

# **Bachelor Thesis 2015**

## **Training of North American travel agents with interactive online learning courses: The case of Switzerland Tourism North America**

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## Abstract

With a continuous growth of online booking channels and very knowledgeable consumers, travel advisors must develop strong product knowledge to remain competitive. Interactive online learning courses are often used to train travel professionals, as they offer flexibility and save time and money. New technologies allow learners to interact with the program and be prepared to situations that they are likely to encounter with clients. With the aim of educating travel professionals, Switzerland Tourism launched in 2013 an online interactive learning course – called the Switzerland Advisor Program – on the North American market. After two years of using this tool, the company would like to find out whether it provides an efficient way to train travel professionals. This study analyzes how this course could be improved in order for travel advisors to be more confident in selling the destination Switzerland. A mixed approach including quantitative and qualitative research, completed by an external benchmark, was adopted. The results prove that online learning courses are widely used by travel professionals and that they are beneficial to them. Online learning courses should use the technologies available nowadays to make the learning process as interactive, fun and efficient as possible, in order to increase information retention and learners' motivation. They should focus on improving selling skills instead of pure knowledge about a destination. Furthermore, a tailor-made program with optional modules could answer the different needs of travel professionals. This research presents specific recommendations that Switzerland Tourism could use for a future development of its own program.

**Keywords:** Online training, eLearning, travel agents, Switzerland Tourism, DMO

## Résumé

Avec l'internet de plus en plus utilisé comme moyen de réservation et des voyageurs toujours mieux informés, les agents de voyages doivent développer d'excellentes connaissances des produits pour rester compétitifs. Les cours e-learning sont de plus en plus utilisés dans l'industrie du tourisme en raison de la flexibilité qu'ils offrent, permettant un gain de temps et des économies financières. Les nouvelles technologies permettent à l'apprenant d'interagir avec le programme et ainsi, de se préparer au mieux à des situations qu'il rencontrera dans son travail quotidien. Dans le but d'éduquer les professionnels du voyage, Suisse Tourisme a, en 2013, développé un programme e-learning pour le marché américain, le Switzerland Advisor Program. L'entreprise souhaite aujourd'hui savoir si ce programme permet de former les agents de voyages de manière adéquate. Cette étude analyse les possibilités d'amélioration du cours afin de rendre les agents de voyages davantage sûrs d'eux et confiants lorsqu'ils vendent la destination Suisse. Une approche mixte a été utilisée, incluant une étude quantitative, une étude qualitative et un benchmark. Les résultats prouvent que les cours e-learning sont largement utilisés par les professionnels du voyage et leur sont bénéfiques. Cependant, ces cours devraient davantage utiliser les technologies disponibles aujourd'hui pour les rendre interactifs, agréables et efficaces, et ainsi augmenter le taux de rétention et la motivation des apprenants. Ces cours devraient avant tout apprendre à vendre la destination au mieux, et non se concentrer sur des connaissances détaillées. De plus, la possibilité de personnaliser le programme permettrait de répondre au mieux aux besoins variés des agents de voyages. Cette recherche propose des recommandations spécifiques à Suisse Tourisme afin d'améliorer son programme e-learning.

**Mots-clés :** Online training, E-learning, agents de voyages, Suisse Tourisme, DMO

## Zusammenfassung

Mit einem kontinuierlichen Wachstum von Online-Buchungskanälen und sehr gut informierten Reisenden müssen Reiseberater starke Produktkenntnisse entwickeln, um wettbewerbsfähig zu bleiben. E-Learning Kurse werden häufig hingesetzt, um Reiseprofis fortzubilden, weil sie Flexibilität bieten und erlauben, Zeit und Geld zu sparen. Neue Technologien ermöglichen Lernenden, mit dem Programm zu interagieren, um sich auf Situationen vorzubereiten, mit denen sie im täglichen Kunden Kontakt konfrontiert werden. Mit dem Ziel, Reiseprofis zu schulen, hat Schweiz Tourismus 2013 einen E-Learning Kurs, das so genannte Switzerland Advisor Program, auf dem Nordamerikanischen Markt eingeführt. Nun, zwei Jahre später, möchte das Unternehmen herausfinden, ob dieser eine effiziente Möglichkeit bietet, Reiseprofis fortzubilden. Diese Studie untersucht, wie der Kurs verbessert werden könnte, damit Reiseberater selbstbewusster im Verkauf der Destination Schweiz werden. Ein kombinierter Ansatz quantitativer und qualitativer Forschungen, mit einem zusätzlichen Benchmark, wurde angewandt. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass E-Learning Kurse für Reiseberater weit verbreitet sind, und dass sie für sie vorteilhaft sind. E-Learning Kurse sollten die heute verfügbaren Technologien beinhalten, um den Lernprozess so interaktiv, spannend und effizient wie möglich zu gestalten und, um den Informationsaustausch und die Motivation der Lernenden zu erhöhen. Anstatt reine Kenntnisse über die Destination zu vermitteln, sollte die Verbesserung der Verkaufsfähigkeiten im Fokus stehen. Weiterhin kann ein massgeschneidertes Programm mit optionalen Modulen die unterschiedlichen Bedürfnisse der Reiseprofi abdecken. Die vorliegende Studienarbeit zeigt konkrete Empfehlungen und Massnahmen, die Schweiz Tourismus für eine zukünftige Entwicklung ihrer eigenen Kurse verwenden kann.

**Schlüsselwörter:** Online Training, E-Learning, Reiseberater, Schweiz Tourismus, DMO



## Foreword and acknowledgements

At the end of my studies at the School of Management and Tourism at the HES-SO Valais in Sierre, I had the great opportunity to do a one-year internship in New York at Switzerland Tourism North America. The mission of the Swiss National Tourism Board is to promote Switzerland as a vacation, travel and congress destination throughout the United States and Canada. During this year, I had the chance to be part of the Trade Department, as well as the entity Switzerland Convention and Incentive Bureau (SCIB). Moreover, I was in charge of answering questions and giving recommendations to North American travelers to Switzerland.

Working with the Trade team gave me an in-depth understanding of the Trade relations between Switzerland Tourism and North American tour operators and travel agents (Business to Business – B2B). It showed me the importance of training travel professionals to sell the destinations to their customers. In agreement with Pascal Prinz, Account Manager Trade Relations for the East Coast, and Alex Herrmann, Director Americas, both based in New York, I decided to tackle the topic of online training, and more particularly the interactive online learning course – also called eLearning – provided by Destination Management Companies (DMC). Throughout this year, I have been in constant contact with tour operators and travel advisors to help them create the best vacation for their clients. For this reason, I find this topic particularly interesting.

I would like to start by acknowledging my thesis advisor, Mrs Anne-Dominique Salamin, Professor and head of Cyberlearn, the eLearning center of the University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland, who followed me during the realization of this thesis. Her support and valuable advices were greatly appreciated, as well as the great freedom and trust she gave me during this whole project.

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Thank you to Mrs. Maura Byrne, Sr. Vice President, and Mr. Nick Choo, Creative Director at travAlliancemedi, for their time and advices about the future trends in the online learning industry.

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## List of abbreviations

%	Percentage
B2B	Business to Business
CEU	Continuing Education Units
CHF	Swiss Franc
DMC	Destination Management Company
E.g.	<i>Exempli gratia</i> – for example
Etc.	<i>Et cetera</i> – and so forth
HTA	Hawaii Tourism Authority
HTML	Hypertext Markup Language
ICTs	Information Communication Technologies
N.d.	No date
SBB	<i>Schweizerische Bundesbahnen</i> – Swiss Federal Railways
SNCF	<i>Société Nationale des Chemins de Fers Français</i> – French National Railway Company
SCIB	Switzerland Convention & Incentive Bureau
ST	Switzerland Tourism
ST NA	Switzerland Tourism North America
U.S.	United States of America
USD	U.S. Dollar
TNZ	Tourism New Zealand



## Introduction

Tourism is an industry where the adoption, integration and successful use of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are exceptionally suitable. Nowadays, most travel related products are being sold with the help of the Internet. The web has become the primary tool for potential tourists to look for information. Nonetheless, the complex nature of the tourism and hospitality industry presents challenges for travel professionals' education. Constant change and uncertainty require all employees to learn continuously. With a permanent growth of tailored demands from clients, travel agents must develop strong product knowledge, creativity and agility to remain competitive.

Interactive online learning courses have been popular in many sectors, as they offer flexibility in terms of time and place, allowing an easy integration in the work environment. They save time and travel expenses, cutting the cost of traditional learning. Each learner can follow his own pace and retrieve past courses. The new technologies allow participants to interact with the program and knowledge transfer is achieved in a fun and rich-media way. This active learning incentivizes learners to explore, engage and extract content and therefore, be prepared to situations that they are likely to encounter with clients. Interactive online learning courses have been implemented in many companies in the tourism industry, including Switzerland Tourism, the national tourism board of Switzerland.

This study focuses on the North American market (the United States and Canada), where Switzerland Tourism (ST) is present with 18 full-time positions. The company is currently using different channels to promote Switzerland and its touristic products: directly to the end consumer, through the media, or in collaboration with tour operators and travel agents. With the aim of educating travel professionals, the Trade department of Switzerland Tourism North America (ST NA) launched an online interactive learning tool in 2013, called the Switzerland Advisor Program. After two years of using this course and over 900 certified travel agents in the market, ST NA would like to find out whether this course provides an efficient way to train travel professionals. It wants to know how this course could be improved in order to increase the number of certified travel professionals and improve their knowledge, with the goal of increasing the number of overnights sold by tour operators and travel agents.

The overall objective of this study is to analyze the impact of the current interactive online course offered by ST NA, the Switzerland Advisor Program, on travel agents and to give recommendations on how to improve this tool. The first chapter gives a theoretical background of the study, explaining the importance of travel agents' education and reviewing the existing literature related to online learning. The second part describes the company Switzerland Tourism, its presence in North America and its activities to train travel

professionals. The third chapter presents the research question, the problematic and the hypothesis, as well as the detailed goals of the study. The fourth chapter describes the methodology used for the research and justifies the use of a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative research, completed by a benchmark. The fifth section presents the results of the survey and in-depth interviews conducted with travel professionals, as well as the result of the benchmark analysis among tourism companies. The last chapter draws the main findings from the research presented in the previous chapters, and recommendations are given for the implementation of future interactive online learning courses.

## 1. Theoretical background

This chapter presents the theoretical background of this study. The first part evaluates the importance of travel agents' training and investigates the role played by the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the tourism industry. Theoretical foundation of this study is then examined, online learning is defined, and benefits of interaction in the online learning process are presented.

### 1.1 Importance of travel agents' education

The complex nature of the tourism and hospitality industry presents challenges for employees' education and training in terms of accessibility, deliverability, time, and need. Constant change and uncertainty within the tourism industry creates a situation that requires all employees to learn continuously (Cho & Schmelzer in Kalbaska, Lee, Cantoni, & Law, 2013, p. 7). Moreover, the way that employees are recruited, managed, educated and trained, valued, rewarded and supported plays a large role in the success of tourism business, through a process of continuous learning and career development. In order to stay on cutting edge and consolidate their position, travel agents need to constantly upgrade their knowledge and skills (Kalbaska et al., 2013, p. 7).

Matthew Upchurch, Chairman and Chief Executive of Virtuoso<sup>1</sup>, believes in a bright future for travel agents, underlining the human touch. A travel agent is a knowledgeable advisor who provides recommendations, creativity and advocacy, which are hard to come online. According to Upchurch, clients will, in the future, continue to pay for someone's time, expertise and connections, which is invaluable. Moreover, social media and mobility have boosted travel agents' profession. They travel more and more, post on social media and enhance their own credibility. Because of mobility, they have the ability to help their clients whenever those are in need (Vora, 2015).

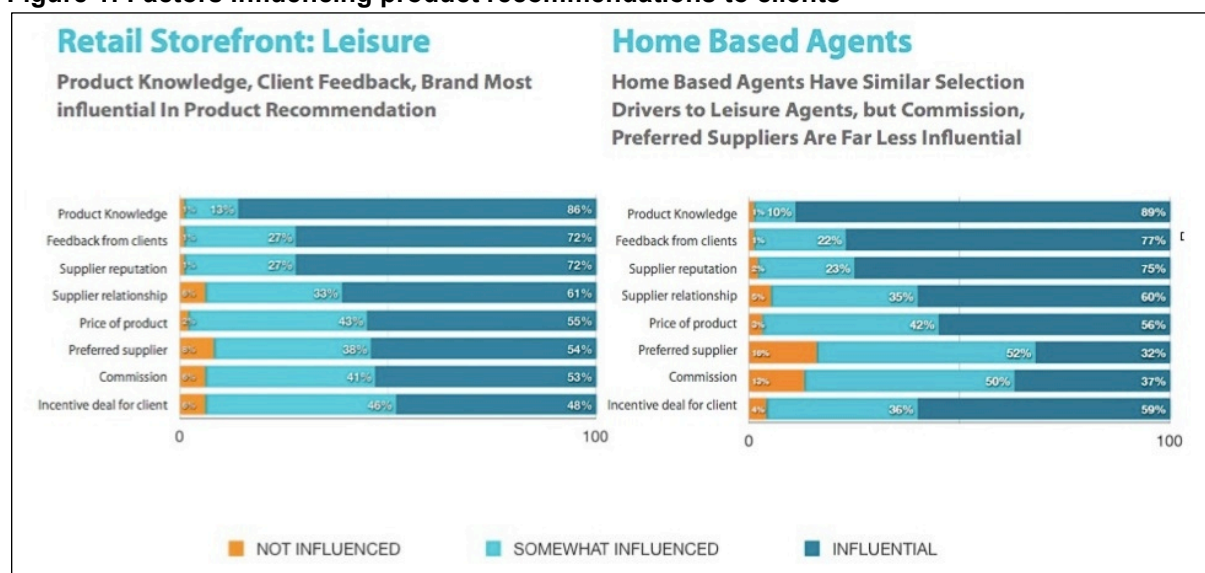
If travel advisors have a strong influence on customers' decisions, product knowledge is the factor that influences most product recommendation to clients. According to PhoCusWright Research (in Byrne, 2014, p. 4), 89% of home-based U.S. agents and 86% of retail agents from U.S. companies view products knowledge as the number one driver when considering what destination, hotel, tour package, airline or cruise to suggest (Figure 1). Travel agents are consultative specialists, where product knowledge defines their success

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<sup>1</sup> Virtuoso is a global luxury network of travel advisors and more than 1,700 hotels, cruise lines and tour operators (Virtuoso Ltd., 2015 ; Vora S., 2015).

more than ever: U.S. travel agents influence the final destination for their clients 57% of the time, the hotel choice 62% of the time and the tour package 60% of the time (Y Partnership in Byrne, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, travel agents' education and training is more important than ever and companies active in the travel and tourism industry need to take this fact into consideration in order to stay competitive.

**Figure 1: Factors influencing product recommendations to clients**



Source: Byrne (2014, p. 4)

Furthermore, according to Upchurch (Vora, 2015), travel agents who can present something with impact and clarity, and who can customize a package to the end consumer will have a much greater value today. Destinations have, therefore, much to gain by not only training travel agents, but also giving them the right tools to find information by themselves.

According to Pope (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 108), unlike in other markets where Switzerland Tourism is present, most travel agents working in the North America are older and home-based. They appreciate the use of logos and certificates: they often use them on their websites, email signatures and business cards. A certification often serves as a status symbol for travels advisors based on this continent. Furthermore, travel agents in North America do not limit themselves to one single course: They tend to take the online training programs of many destinations (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 91). However, according to E. Crabill (Personal communication, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015), President of Travel Bound<sup>1</sup>, a new generation of travel agents is appearing on the market: younger, well-traveled and familiar with new

<sup>1</sup> Travel Bound is one of the biggest tour operators worldwide. It is a retail brand within GTA, the leading global wholesaler and a division of Kuoni Group.

technologies and social media, they will give new impetus to the profession. Therefore, travel and tourism industries need to take this into consideration while implementing online learning tools.

## **1.2 Information and Communication Technologies in the tourism industry**

Tourism is an industry where the adoption, integration and successful use of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are exceptionally suitable. For instance, travel related products are being sold mainly with the help of the Internet nowadays (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 13). Information accessibility is an aspect that has been tremendously influenced by the diffusion of ICTs. Distribution information has been transformed within the last twenty years from print material to digital material: The Internet has become one of the most important source of information worldwide and the primary tool for potential tourists to look for information. Furthermore, ICTs have had a deep impact on all business processes, changing dramatically the strategic relationships and competitiveness of tourism organizations (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 9).

## **1.3 Online learning concept**

Distance education has a history that is almost two centuries old and this time period represents significant changes in how learning occurs and is communicated. From basic correspondence through postal service to the wide variety of tools available through the Internet, society has embraced new forms of communication through the years. One such form, online learning, is known to have a history of access beginning in the 1980's (Moore, Dickson-Dean, & Gaylen, 2011, p. 129).

The term "eLearning" has been used for the first time in the late 1990's as an abbreviation from "electronic learning". A number of other terms were used in the academic literature in order to define the process of ICTs integration within learning and training activities. For instance, "online or distance learning", "virtual learning environment", "computer-based training", "computer mediated training", "electronically enabled learning", "technology-enhanced learning" (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 20).

According to the Commission of the European Communities (2001, p. 1), online learning can be defined as "the use of new multimedia technologies and the Internet to improve the quality of learning by facilitating access to resources and services as well as remote exchanges and collaboration". Online learning involves all learning activities using

technologies, which include the delivery and management of training options and support via computers, smartphones and tablets (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 19).

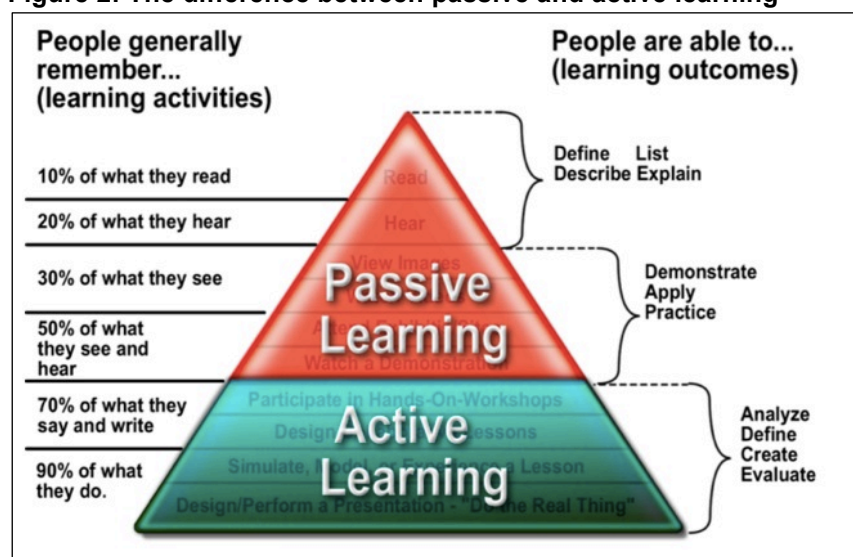
Online learning has been adopted and is being used by various sectors, such as banks, insurances, pharmaceutical corporations or IT companies, in order to update the knowledge of the company's staff (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 19). The Internet has made it possible for employees from different industries in different locations and students all around the world to learn, be trained and interact online (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 10-23). According to McGreal and Elliot (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 19), "education is one of the fastest-growing economic and social sectors in the world, and the use of new technologies is an integral and driving component of that growth".

Stassen and Poe (2012, p. 6) differentiate two approaches to online learning: synchronous and asynchronous learning. Synchronous learning means education in live via the Internet: typical tools include live chat, webinars, data and application sharing, shared whiteboard, virtual "hand raising" and joint viewing of multimedia presentations and online slide shows. On the other hand, asynchronous learning methods use the time-delayed capabilities of the Internet, involving the following tools: email, threaded discussion, newsgroups, bulletin boards and file attachments. In asynchronous courses, learning does not need to be scheduled in the same way as synchronous learning, allowing students and instructors to learn and teach anywhere and anytime (Stassen & Poe, 2012, p. 6).

## **1.4 Interactive online learning course**

Even though online learning or eLearning refers to every type of learning support that is helped by an electronic technology, this study will focus on a specific type of eLearning: interactive online learning courses. Referring to the classification of Stassen and Poe previously presented, interactive online learning course is an asynchronous learning method (not led by a physical instructor) that can be self-paced. This research will not take into consideration any other type of online learning, such as webinars or video streaming.

Unlike basic web pages that simply reorganize information on HTML screens with little interaction, online learning courses use an interactive management system, which allows transferring knowledge in a fun, rich-media and interactive way. This active learning causes a student to explore, engage and extract content. As shown in Figure 2, active learning increases concentration and most effectively transfers knowledge needed to sell a brand or a destination most effectively. Therefore, the key to effective online learning is realized by delivering students knowledge in an interactive and engaging way (Byrne, 2014, p. 6).

**Figure 2: The difference between passive and active learning**

Source: Byrne (2014, p. 6)

Interactive online learning courses have been adopted and are being used in various sectors in order to update employees' knowledge. It enables the education of sales teams on the latest products developments without an actual need of organizing in-presence training sessions. Banks, insurances, pharmaceutical corporations, IT companies and governmental agencies are using online learning platforms to give initial training to staff joining the company or to keep them updated (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 19). Due to the development of technological innovations, including high-speed Internet and mobile devices, online training is becoming a commonplace. According to PRweb (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 19), the worldwide online training industry market is estimated to be worth over USD 100 billion.

## 1.5 Advantages and disadvantages of online learning

Collins, Buhalis, & Peter (2003, pp. 3-5) have illustrated the advantages and disadvantages of online learning in work and school environments (Table 1). The main advantage is the flexibility in terms of time and place, which allows an easy integration in the work environment. Furthermore, online learning is cutting the cost of traditional learning as it saves travel expenses and time. According to Collins et al. (2003, p. 4), online learning is an effective way of educating employees as they retain more information than with traditional learning. Last but not least, retrieving past courses is another big advantage of online learning.

Even if online learning has many advantages, some disadvantages and challenges have to be taken into consideration. The participants' need for being self-disciplined is one of the biggest challenges of online learning. A structure needs to be implemented in order to ensure

conclusive results. Additionally, the IT equipment and skills required might be an issue for some employees (Collins et al., 2003, pp. 3-5).

**Table 1: Advantages and disadvantages of online learning**

Advantages	Disadvantages
The technology offers the opportunity to integrate learning with work.	Initial set up and running costs or purchasing access systems can be high to commercial.
Enhances employee performance in a dynamic, interactive and measurable way.	An infrastructure needs to be in place for employees to use the system.
Provides information instantaneously.	Lack of a robust Internet connection to take advantage of the graphic rich courses designed for online learning.
Can increase efficiency.	An assessment system needs to be in place, which helps determine what information employees are learning and provide feedback to inform managers of how successful employees are in the modules.
It is a less expensive method of training as it eliminates travel expenses and the time that it takes to travel to a training session.	Electronic communication requires specific skills, which not everybody has mastered.
Enables employee to log on everywhere and anywhere.	Learning is impersonal and interaction with tutor is limited.
Eliminates the need to create and print manuals, which become obsolete after being distributed.	Tutor does not take sufficient feedback from students: limited diagnostics of learning.
Mostly modular based, employees can dedicate shorter time periods over a number of days or weeks and still learn the required information.	Student requires high degree of self-discipline.
Additional material is easily accessible online.	
Some courses linked to professional and academic qualifications.	
Allows the employee to learn at his/her own pace in the style of learning that works best for them.	
Ability to retain more information (Employees can retain 30% more information from an online learning platform compared to 10% retained if learning in the traditional way.	

Source: Adapted from Collins et al. (2003, p. 4)



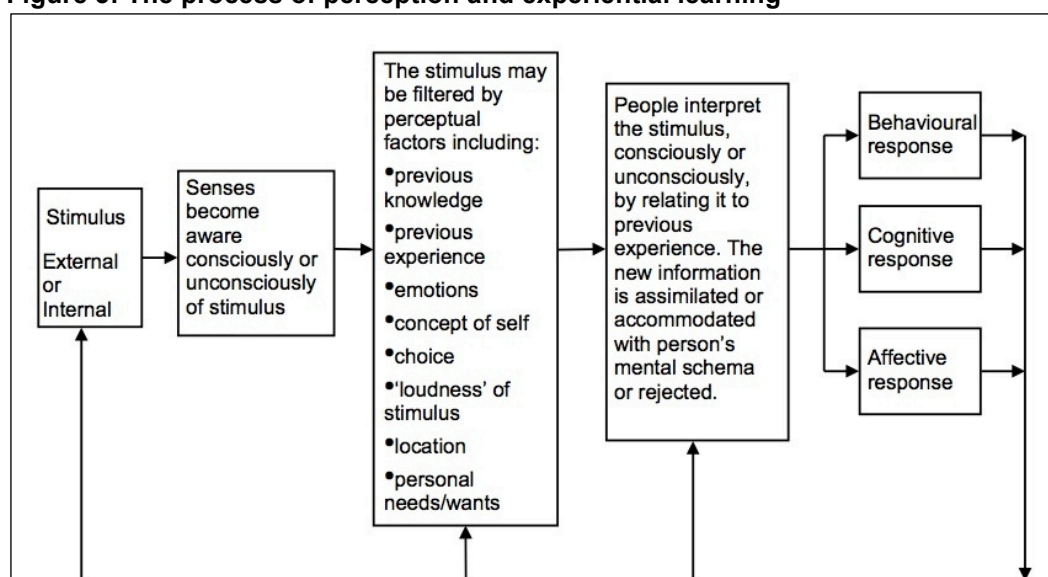
## 1.6 Interaction in online learning courses

Interaction in online learning courses is a key element of the learning process. McVay Lynch (2004, p. 30) suggests that “the more interactive the instruction, the more effective the learning outcome is likely to be”. Interaction can be defined as a “dialogue between learners and online learning tools through which learners become engaged and involved in the learning process” (Pappas, 2015). It involves forms of action or reaction on learners’ behalf, in order for them to achieve results or reach a conclusion.

According to Sherry (in Beard, Wilson & McCarter, 2007, p. 8) without two-way communication, online learning could degenerate into the old correspondence course model of independent study: the more sensory and real the learning experience, the greater the potential for learning. Clark and Mayer (in Beard et al., 2007, p. 8) maintain that there are a number of advantages in mixing the mediums in learning processes. An important part of active processing is to mentally construct pictorial and verbal representations of the material and to mentally connect these with words and pictures. Learning is a process of active sense making and people learn more deeply from text and pictures than from words alone. Visual information supports learning, and 75% of our ability to learn can be attributed to visual perception: the use of visual enhances comprehension (Beard et al., 2007, p. 8).

Throughout the online learning experience, participants interact with the world and learn from this experience by processing stimuli received through their senses. Figure 3 presents the learning model, in which five main elements interact: the stimuli, the senses, the filtering process, interpretation, and finally, the responses (Beard et al., 2007, p. 5).

**Figure 3: The process of perception and experiential learning**



Source: Beard and al. (2007, p. 5)

Online interactions include activities that help learners deepen their understanding of the subject matter through experimentation, dealing with unpredicted circumstances or learning from their mistakes. The following activities are the most common in interactive online learning courses: multiple choice quizzes, click and drop activities, interactive puzzles, true or false quizzes, videos and animations, interactive maps or even scenarios (Appendix I – Interaction in online learning courses) (Pappas, 2015 ; Byrne, 2014, pp. 14-15). Poor design is often the main reason why an online learning course is not successful (Piskurich, 2004, p. 153).

Online discussion forums are also an important part of an online learning program. It serves a dual purpose: to improve learning and to provide support. It may, therefore, be the case that factors such as the frequency of the interactions are likely to be more important in providing support, whereas quality and dynamics of the interactions may be the more important influencing factors in learning and performance (Davies & Graff, 2005, p. 663).

### **1.6.1 The growing importance of serious games**

Serious games usually refer to games used for training, advertising, simulation, or education that are designed to run on personal computers or video game consoles (Susi, Johannesson & Backlund, 2007, p. 3). They are being described by some analysts as the next wave of technology-mediated learning (Derryberry, 2007, p. 1). According to Corti (in Susi & al., 2007, p. 3) “it is all about leveraging the power of computer games to captivate and engage end-users for a specific purpose, such as to develop new knowledge and skills”. Serious games offer a powerful and effective approach to learning and skills development. Several researches have been conducted on the effectiveness of online games as learning tools. Reviews conclude that games motivate players to spend time on task mastering the skills that a game imparts. Many design elements, such as narrative context, rules, goals, rewards, multisensory cues, and interactivity, seem necessary to stimulate the desired learning outcomes. Nowadays, a growing number of companies around the world are bringing serious games into the workplace to train employees and new hires, or to recruit new talents (Derryberry, 2007, pp. 5-6). Figure 4 shows an example of serious game used by McDonald’s restaurants to train store personnel, in this case about customer service, and more examples are to be found in Appendix I – Interaction in online learning courses

“Gamification” techniques strive to leverage the natural desire for socializing, learning and competing. Arshavskiy (2015) affirms that learning is not about memorizing or learning by heart: simulations and games can challenge and engage a learner into actually comprehending and then practicing new skills. The reason is that if learners have the

objective to win a game, they will need to explore and understand the system in order to beat it.

**Figure 4: McDonald's restaurants use serious games to train store personnel**



Source: Derryberry (2007, p. 9)

### 1.6.2 Online learning interaction levels

Pappas (2015) has defined four online learning interaction levels based on the extent of interactivity in the online learning process:

#### **Passive interactivity level: no interaction**

Learners are not asked to interact with online resources and the learning process is only linear: this level may include simple images or graphics, simple video and audio or test questions.

#### **Limited interactivity level: limited participation**

Learners may have some control over their online learning experience, as they are required to make simple interactions with the online material. This level may include simple animations, clickable menus, drag and drop activities and multimedia.

#### **Moderate interactivity level: moderate interaction**

Learners have more control over the online learning experience, which is more customized and complex. This level may include animated video, customized audio, complex drag and drop activities, simulations, stories and scenarios.

### **Full interactivity level: full immersion**

Learners gain great control over their online learning experience, as they are required to fully interact with the online learning tool and give feedback. This level may include interactive games, simulated job performance exercises, customized audio or videos, stories and scenarios, as well as multimedia (Pappas, 2015). Serious games, developed in chapter 1.6.1, require learners to fully immerse themselves in the problem they have to solve.

#### **1.6.3 The benefits of interaction in online learning**

The aim of an interactive online learning program is to motivate, engage and inspire learners, with the goal of enhancing learning outcomes. Interactivity has been proven to activate long-term memory and to improve attention, which are both essential parts of all learning mechanisms (Pappas, 2015).

Interaction causes reaction. When learners are forced to apply what they know from the online learning experience to an actual situation, they are encouraged to explore what will happen in case of success or fail. When learners are able to create their own action plan in a risk-free and non-judgmental environment, they can make their own experiences with unpredictable paths and without stress; when they will have face the actual problem or the actual customer in the real world, they will be able to handle complex tasks with a high rate of success (Pappas, 2015).

Interaction encourages reflection. With questions or quizzes, learners are able to integrate the content into their own way of thinking. The online learning experience encourages their involvement, as they receive feedback, which is a key element in any interactive mechanism (Pappas, 2015).

Furthermore, interaction creates motivation: “fun” elements such as multimedia, interactive scenarios and games motivate learners to participate more willingly in the training process. The more interesting an online learning course is, the more intensive the learners’ motivation will be. An opportunity for reflection, such as a question that makes learners stop and think, motivates them much more than only clicking the “next” button (Pappas, 2015).

Finally, interaction enhances knowledge retention and boost engagement. Interactive activities create curiosity and transform the online learning course into an engaging, emotionally driven and, most importantly, memorable learning experience. Interactive activities engage learners in the learning process by directing their attention to the learning content. Powerful stories and interesting questions create cognitive notes and allow learners to immerse these notes deeply in their minds (Pappas, 2015).

## 2. Context of the study

The second chapter of this study presents the context of the research by describing the company Switzerland Tourism and its presence and role in the North American market. Furthermore, the current interactive online learning course offered by Switzerland Tourism North America is described in chapter 2.4.3.

### 2.1 Switzerland Tourism, the national tourism board of Switzerland

Representing 4.6% of export revenue in 2013, tourism ranks third amongst Swiss economy's exporting sectors and has a significant impact on the country's growth and employment (Swiss Tourism Federation, 2015, p.4). According to the Federal Statistical Office (in Swiss Tourism Federation, 2015, p. 4), Swiss tourism generated a revenue of CHF 38.5 billion in 2014, while the gross value added reached CHF 16.5 billion, which shows a strong growth of 2.0% over the previous year.

The marketing organization Switzerland Tourism has been promoting Switzerland by federal mandate, in Switzerland and abroad, as a vacation, travel and meeting destination for over 90 years. Switzerland Tourism positions the country as a tourism brand standing for quality, nature, authenticity, sustainability and modernity. The company develops with its partners a systematic marketing program that is implemented through a full range of promotional and sales techniques. Switzerland Tourism is a public corporation: its board comprises 13 representatives from tourism, business and industry associations. Headquartered in Zurich, the company is present in 28 countries and employs 245 staff (Switzerland Tourism, 2015a, p. 8).

Switzerland Tourism is 60% financed by the government and 40% by its earnings and partners' contributions (Switzerland Tourism, 2015a, p. 8). Organizationally, Switzerland Tourism is divided into six different units (see Appendix II – Organizational chart of Switzerland Tourism):

- Market services department and meetings;
- Portal management, eMarketing, and IT;
- Corporate communication, media and market research;
- Marketing and strategic partnerships;
- Business development;
- Finance, controlling, and human resources.

Switzerland's incoming visitors originate from three distinctive types of markets:

- **Priority markets** are the countries where Switzerland Tourism operates an office and deploys an integral and comprehensive marketing mix (China, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland, United Kingdom, the United States).
- **Strategic growth markets**, described as countries with above-average growth opportunities and potential (Brazil, Gulf States, India, Poland, Russia, South-East Asia).
- **Active markets**, where national presence and marketing strategy are currently in the active development process (Austria and Hungary, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Japan, Korea, Nordic Countries, Spain).

In addition, Switzerland Tourism monitors selected markets in Latin America, South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia and reviews the cost and benefit ratio for more extensive market development work (Switzerland Tourism, 2015a, pp. 8-9).

## 2.2 Online presence of Switzerland Tourism

Switzerland Tourism appreciates and embraces all the possibilities that the development of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) and the Internet has brought. The later one is believed to be the most important source of touristic information and one that comes into contact with all potential tourists planning to visit the country (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 93).

In the online marketing sphere, Switzerland Tourism operates a website called MySwitzerland.com, which serves as the main platform for all required information that potential clients might look for while preparing their trips to Switzerland. This website is a central hub for online communication of Switzerland Tourism, enabling marketing and sales activities on the website itself. Moreover, both textual and multimedia content, which are present on the main website, can be adapted and published on partners' websites and distributed via other applications e.g. smartphone applications (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 93). Switzerland Tourism offers 22 free mobile apps and is also present on most social media channels. Each market has its own version of the website MySwitzerland.com, allowing market specific information to be displayed.



## 2.3 Switzerland Tourism North America and its Trade department

Switzerland Tourism has been present on the North American market since 1927, and has three offices located in New York (U.S.) – main office with 14 full-time positions –, Los Angeles (U.S.) and Toronto (Canada), both with two full-time positions (Switzerland Tourism, 2015b, p. 9).

According to the Swiss Federal Statistical Office (Huser, 2015b, p. 3), the United States, with a total of 1'909'900 overnights<sup>1</sup> in 2014, are one of Switzerland Tourism's eight priority markets along with China, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Switzerland and United Kingdom (with Ireland). Altogether, these markets represented 75% of overnights in the Swiss hotel sector in 2014. 2014 has been a very successful year with a growth in overnights of approximately 6% compared to 2013, making 2014 the fifth year in a row with growing numbers of American travelers in Switzerland. After overtaking the United Kingdom in arrivals last year, the United States is now the second most important foreign market for Switzerland regarding overnights, following Germany. Several indicators point to this growth being mostly in the leisure market, while business travel seems to be stable. With a current positive economic situation in the United States, a growth of 5% to 10% over the next three years is more than realistic (Switzerland Tourism, 2015b, p. 4).

With a total of 278'130 overnights<sup>1</sup> in 2014, Canada is considered as an active market, along with Australia (with New Zealand and Oceania), Austria and Hungary, Belgium and Luxembourg, Czech Republic, Japan, Nordic Countries (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden), Southeast Asia (Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand), South Korea and Spain (Huser, 2015a, p. 3). Altogether, they represented 11% of overnights in the Swiss hotel sector in 2014 (Switzerland Tourism, 2015, p. 8). Canada's economic outlook in 2015 and 2016 remains stable with an expected growth of 2.6 % in 2015 and of 2.4 % in 2016 (Switzerland Tourism, 2015b, p. 25).

Switzerland Tourism North America (ST NA) promotes the destination Switzerland in the North American market. It is divided into five different departments: Administration and Human Resources, Promotion and Customer Care, Trade Relations, Media, and Meetings (also known as Switzerland Tourism & Convention Bureau – SCIB). Appendix III shows the organization chart of the company.

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<sup>1</sup> Overnight volume all accommodations in 2014

As this Bachelor Thesis focuses on travel professionals' training, the following section describes the activities developed by the Trade Relations department, whose goal is to build and maintain trustworthy, high quality and long-term contacts with travel agents and tour operators. Switzerland Tourism North America develops and implements different activities and tools to support and help them: Sales Calls weeks and one-to-one meetings with market representatives, familiarization trips, collaboration with marketing alliances, a sales manual, a trade e-newsletter, an online Trade Corner and a Switzerland Tourism Campus to train travel professionals.

The first activity is the Sales Calls, also called Best of Switzerland, which the company organizes six times a year. A representative of ST NA travels throughout the United States and Canada with Swiss partners to meet travel agents and tour operators in person during a week. The goal of these visits is for the tour operators to offer new tours featuring Switzerland, as well as to train travel agents that sell the destination. Familiarization trips, also known as study or educational trips, are another important activity. They offer travel professionals the chance to visit Switzerland and experience themselves the products they offer. Then, Switzerland Tourism collaborates with external entities, more specifically with Consortia such as Virtuoso and Signature Travel Network; those marketing alliances represent a group of travel agents, who pay a membership fee in order to be promoted under the umbrella of the alliance in many different countries. The "Switzerland Yodel" is a sales manual dedicated to travel professionals produced by ST NA. It contains information about Swiss partners and destinations, suggested itineraries, hotel recommendations and many tips. All these activities are reinforced by a bi-monthly trade e-newsletter, which also includes various offers and information. An online Trade Corner, available on the webpage [MySwitzerland.com/Trade](http://MySwitzerland.com/Trade), provides travel agents and wholesalers with useful information and tips to help them sell Switzerland, and gives current updates about the destination, enabling travel agents to create packages that suite their clients' needs. Moreover, it serves as a core component to provide additional support and resources to assist trade partners with travel sales activities (Kalbaska, 2013, pp. 93-104). The Trade Corner also includes a section called "Switzerland Tourism Campus", which is dedicated to the online education and training of travel professionals.



## **2.4 The Switzerland Tourism Campus for North American travel professionals**

The goal of the Switzerland Tourism Campus is to train North American travel professionals. It offers a social platform on LinkedIn, webinars and an interactive online learning course, called the Switzerland Advisor Program (Knecht, 2012, p. 3).

### **2.4.1 Social platform LinkedIn**

LinkedIn operates the world's largest professional network on the Internet with more than 347 million members in over 200 countries, and is an excellent platform to network professionally (LinkedIn Corporation, 2015). In 2012, The Trade Relations department of Switzerland Tourism created a LinkedIn professional group called "Switzerland Tourism Goldflower Club" (see Appendix IV). The group is targeted exclusively to tourism professionals operating out of North America into the Swiss market. The group's goal is to help travel businesses better promote and sell their services and products by improving their knowledge on Switzerland in an efficient way: the group works as a platform to discuss questions about Switzerland as a travel destination. Partners of ST NA can become members of the group and obtain the right to post information on their region (Knecht, 2012, p. 4). The Trade staff also posts and shares news about Switzerland, its partners, top offers and some valuable tips for tourism professionals. The LinkedIn group counts over 400 members in 2015.

### **2.4.2 Webinars**

Since 2003, Switzerland Tourism offers travel professionals the opportunity to attend web-conferences – better known as webinars. ST NA was the first market to offer that kind of education to trade partners (Kurt, 2014, p. 10). Swiss partners have the possibility to present their destination to North American travel professionals. Webinars are presented every two weeks by the Trade staff in collaboration with a partner, which is either a Swiss destination or a North American tour operator. The 2015 schedule can be found in Appendix V. The goal of the webinars is to present in-depth information about a specific topic or a specific region, and to give travel professionals local tips and insights that they cannot find in a traditional brochure. The participation to the webinars offered by Switzerland Tourism North America has significantly increased during the last two years, with an average number of attendees of 24 in 2013 and 74 in 2015. Participants can listen to them live or watch the recording online afterwards.

### 2.4.3 The Switzerland Advisor Program

This sub-chapter describes the interactive online learning course offered by ST NA in the United States and Canada, from its origins to the benefits offered to certified travel agents.

#### History

The idea of a Switzerland Tourism interactive online learning course came up in 2004. After a series of internal discussions and developments, the training program was launched as a pilot project for the Chinese and Korean market in 2005. At that time, the platform was managed internally at head office in Zurich within the IT department. Contents and exams were then passed onto the markets where Switzerland Tourism is present and the content was adapted to specific needs (Kalbaska, 2014, p. 38). Nowadays, this program – called Switzerland Travel Academy – is accessible globally free of charge and can be found on the website [www.elearning.myswitzerland.com](http://www.elearning.myswitzerland.com). Recently, Switzerland Tourism announced that the Switzerland Travel Academy platform would close at the end of 2016; instead, the company encourages local solutions in each market (U. Eberhard, Head of Markets at Switzerland Tourism, Personal Communication, October 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015).

In 2013, ST NA decided to design and create its own online learning course in order to provide travel agents with a shorter and easier program with the aim to reach a higher number of professionals. This new course, the Switzerland Advisor Program, has been developed in collaboration with the Travel Agent Academy and can be found on the website [www.travelagentacademy.com/Switzerland](http://www.travelagentacademy.com/Switzerland). The Travel Agent Academy is a platform launched by the U.S. based media group travAlliancemedi and dedicated to educate travel agents and build engaging and long-term relationships within the travel industry (travAlliancemedi, 2015). This company was chosen for the features it offers to create an interactive online learning course, as well as for its well-established network of travel professionals. The Switzerland Advisor Program is offered free of charge to travel professionals. It is the only online learning course promoted by Switzerland Tourism to North American travel professionals – the company does no longer promote the Switzerland Travel Academy in its market. Therefore, only the Switzerland Advisor Program is analyzed in this research.

#### Description of the program

The Switzerland Advisor Program is divided into four chapters (see Appendix VI). The first chapter gives travel agents an overview of the country: prime markets, facts and figures and information about transportation. In chapter two, travel agents learn about the different destinations within Switzerland, the cities and the different regions. The third chapter focuses

on activities to do in Switzerland, as well as special interests. Finally, the last chapter is designed to provide travel agents with the resources (such as accommodations, tour operators operating from North America and incoming operators based in Switzerland) they need to plan Switzerland vacations for their clients. Throughout the course, participants have the possibility to get linked to the MySwitzerland.com website (the end consumer website), the Trade Corner (the travel professional website), to download or order brochures, and to save PDF documents on their own computer.

Each chapter is followed by an exam in form of multiple-choice questions (Figure 5). Around three hours are required to complete the four chapters and take the exams. If a user stops half way through the training or through the evaluation activities, the system remembers where he was, so that next time they log in, the system will bring the learner to that exact point. No time limit to complete the program has been set.

**Figure 5: Exam in form of multiple-choice questions**

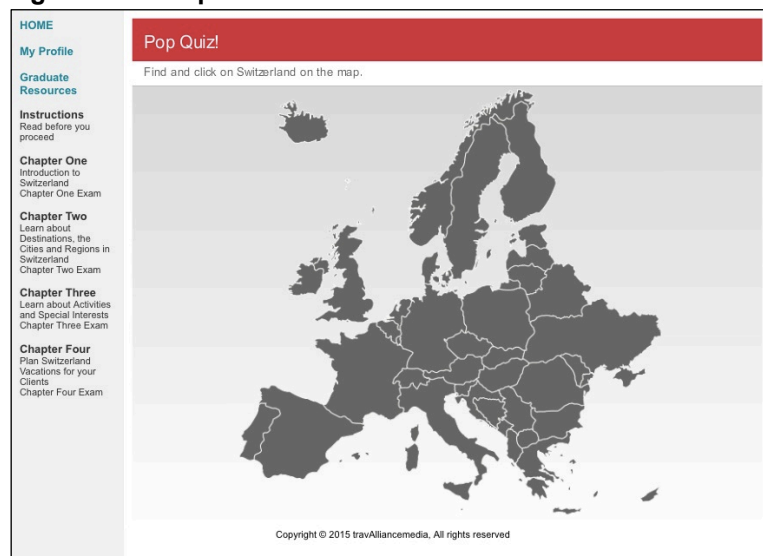
1.) Which of the following is among the primary reasons clients will find an experience in Switzerland like nowhere else?
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Four different languages spoken and four different cultures to explore
<input type="radio"/> Caters to high-end clients only
<input type="radio"/> Above all, exhibits a contemporary Europe experience
2.) Switzerland is about half the size of?
<input type="radio"/> Alaska
<input checked="" type="radio"/> Maine
<input type="radio"/> Texas
3.) Parents (one or both) can bring accompanying children (under 16) free of charge by requesting the Swiss Family Card.
<input checked="" type="radio"/> True
<input type="radio"/> False
4.) There are more and more casinos in Switzerland, where your clients can try their luck?
<input type="radio"/> True
<input checked="" type="radio"/> False
5.) The Swiss Travel Pass includes?
<input type="radio"/> Unlimited travel on all public transport throughout the country
<input type="radio"/> A 50% price reduction off most mountain railways and cableways
<input type="radio"/> Free admission to more than 480 museums nationwide
<input checked="" type="radio"/> All of the above and more
6.) While the Swiss Travel Pass is accepted on all scenic routes (such as the Glacier Express), it's best to check in advance, as a seat reservation and/or supplement may be required.
<input checked="" type="radio"/> True
<input type="radio"/> False

Source: Travel Agent Academy & travAlliancemedi (2015)

## Interaction

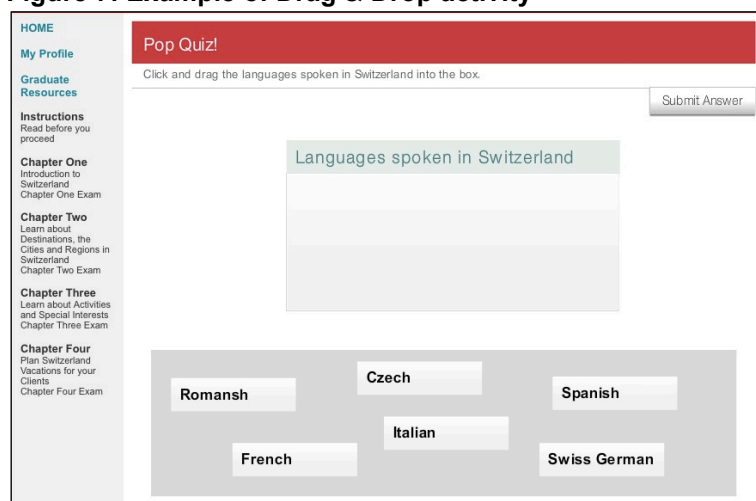
Referring to the classification presented in chapter 1.6.2, the current Switzerland Advisor Program can be classified as “Limited interactivity level”: learners have some control over their online learning experience, as they are required to interact in a simple way. The program features simple drag and drop activities, multiple choice questions and true/false quizzes. Learners also have the possibility to access external websites to find more information. Figure 6 and Figure 7 show some examples of interaction that can be found in the Switzerland Advisor Program.

**Figure 6: Example of interaction**



Source: Travel Agent Academy & travAlliancemediA (2015)

**Figure 7: Example of Drag & Drop activity**

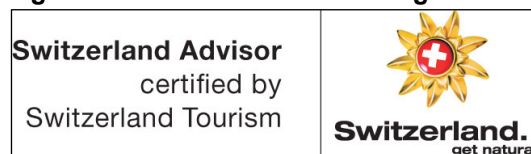


Source: Travel Agent Academy & travAlliancemediA (2015)

## Benefits

After having completed the course, travel agents are certified as “Switzerland Advisors” and receive a diploma. Upon graduation, certified travel agents have the right to use a specific logo (Figure 8) for letters, brochures, website and email signature, have the possibility to order brochures for free, are eligible to be considered for familiarization trips, receive exclusive invitations to Switzerland events in North America and get educational credits (Switzerland Tourism, 2015d). In addition, certified travel agents are listed on the Switzerland Tourism’s consumer website through a lead generation program.

**Figure 8: Switzerland Advisor logo**



Source: Switzerland Tourism (2015d)

## Lead generation program

A zip code lookup widget is placed on the MySwitzerland.com consumer website (Figure 9). It enables end consumers to look for a Switzerland Advisor travel agent in their region. Clients can get the contact information of travel advisors, view their profile, email a question or access a forum where conversations are occurring in real time. This widget offers travel agents an added value, as it generates leads of potential clients.

**Figure 9: Zip code lookup widget**

The widget is a vertical rectangular box with a light gray border. At the top, it has a header "Connect with a Travel Expert" in a dark gray bar. Below this, there are two input fields: "Email Address..." and "Postal Code...". To the right of the "Postal Code..." field is a blue "Connect" button and a "HELP ?" link. Below the input fields, there is a large text block that reads: "Enter your email and postal code above to find travel agents in your area that are Switzerland experts OR". At the bottom, there is a dark blue button that says "Post a Question to our Expert Network" and a link "Visit the Switzerland Tribe" with a small globe icon.

Source: Byrne (2014, p. 8)

## Participation

Since the launch of the platform in 2013, 764 travel professionals based in the United States and 175 based in Canada have completed the program and therefore are certified as Switzerland Advisor<sup>1</sup>. Upon graduation, participants receive a bi-monthly Trade e-newsletter, as well as invitations to join webinars hosted by ST NA.

The total dropout rate of the Switzerland Advisor Program, since its launch in 2013, is around 60%. High dropout rate in online learning courses is a concern to many organizations. According to Meister (in Park, 2007, p. 1), 70% of adult learners enrolled in corporate online courses do not complete it. Rostaminezhad, Mozayani, Norozi, & Iziy (2014, p. 525) affirm that dropout rates between 20 to 80% have been reported in online learning. Motivate learners to complete an online learning course is a major challenge: poor design, lack of relevant to the work place, work pressures, such as phone calls or emails, learner disinterest to the topic and the feeling of being perceived as slacking of the web surfing on company time are among the main reasons for learners not to complete the course (Piskurich, 2004, p. 157).

According to M. Byrne (Sr. Vice President at the Travel Agent Academy, Personal communication, June 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2015), the Switzerland Advisor Program can be considered as a success; it ranks among the most appreciated online learning courses offered by the Travel Agent Academy to North American travel advisors.

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<sup>1</sup> Status on November 22, 2015

### 3. Research question

This chapter develops the problematic and explains the research question, the goals and the hypothesis of the study.

#### 3.1 Problematic

With the aim of educating travel professionals, Switzerland Tourism North America has launched an interactive online learning course, the Switzerland Advisor Program. After two years of using this tool and over 900 certified travel professionals in the United States and Canada, the company would like to find out whether the Switzerland Advisor Program provides an efficient way to train travel agents. It wants to know how this interactive online learning course could be improved in order to increase the number of certified travel advisors and improve their knowledge with the goal of increasing the number of overnights sold by tour operators and travel agents. Furthermore, Switzerland Tourism would like to be considered as a leader in the training field and therefore, needs to know what are the growing trends in the sector.

The research question was formulated as follow:

*“How can Switzerland Tourism North America make the best use of interactive online learning courses in order to increase the knowledge on Switzerland of travel agents based in North America?”*

#### 3.2 Goals and hypothesis

The overall objective of this study is to analyze the impact of the current Switzerland Advisor Program on travel agents and to give Switzerland Tourism North America recommendations in order to improve this platform.

Further goals of this research are:

- To gather information on the latest online learning trends and best practice examples;
- To analyze the users' satisfaction with the content and format of the current Switzerland Advisor Program;
- To give Switzerland Tourism North America practical recommendations in order to improve the current interactive online learning course with the goal to make travel agents more confident in selling the destination;

- To give general recommendations to be implemented in other markets, or for Swiss partners to create their own interactive online learning course.

In order to enable this study to be done in the timeframe allowed for a Bachelor Thesis, it has been decided to narrow this research and focus mainly on the interaction in online learning courses. Therefore, the following hypothesis has been suggested:

*“Including more interaction in the online learning course will significantly increase travel agents’ confidence in selling Switzerland to their clients.”*

The research question is divided into two investigation areas: on one hand understanding whether the training of travel agents via an interactive online learning course can significantly increase their confidence in selling the destination, and on the other hand, giving specific recommendations that will be useful in the future.



## 4. Methodology

The methodology of this study is explained below in two parts. In the first part, the reasons for a use of a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative techniques, completed by a benchmark, are explained. Afterwards, the survey designed for travel professionals, the individual in-depth interviews and the benchmark among the travel and tourism industry best practices are presented. The sample size and the way data was collected are explained, and the limitations of this study are given.

### 4.1 Research methods

This research aims to analyze the impact of the Switzerland Advisor Program on travel professionals and to give Switzerland Tourism North America recommendations in order to improve its current interactive online learning course and increase travel professionals' confidence in selling Switzerland and its touristic products. In order to verify the hypothesis exposed in chapter 3.2, a mixed approach using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods has been chosen, as it gives a better understanding of research problems than either approach alone. According to Creswell and Plano Clarck (2006, pp. 6-10), mixed methods research provides strengths that offset the weaknesses of both quantitative and qualitative research. Quantitative researches are weak in understanding the context or setting in which people talk, as the voices of the participants are not directly heard. On the other hand, qualitative research is seen as deficient because of the personal interpretations made by the researcher, the ensuing bias created by this, and the difficulty in generalizing findings to a large group because of the limited number of participants studied (Creswell & Plano Clarck, 2006, pp. 6-10).

The quantitative research is based on an online survey among travel professionals based on the North American market (United States and Canada); its goal is to provide measurable data to formulate facts. According to Check and Schutt (2011, p. 160), surveys are efficient in a way that many variables can be measured without substantially increasing the time or cost. Survey data can be collected from many people at relatively low cost and relatively quickly.

The qualitative research provides more information about the confidence level of travel professionals in selling the destination after having taken an online learning course, as well as in-depth information to improve the course. It is based on individual interviews with travel professionals that completed the online survey; its goal is to get a better understanding of their needs and of their level of confidence in selling the destination. According to Gillham (2005, pp. 49-50), interviews are necessary to understand the story behind a participant's experience; interviews are a far more personal form of research than surveys. Also,

interviews may be useful as follow-up to certain respondents to questionnaires to further investigate their responses (McNamara in Shrivastava & Valenzuela, n.d.).

## 4.2 Data collection

For the theoretical and literature parts, the data research was mainly done online. Information and data concerning the North American tourism market, as well as Switzerland Tourism facts and figures, were found through Switzerland Tourism. Data mainly comes from the Swiss Federal Statistical Office and was put together by the department of research of Switzerland Tourism. Regarding trends in the North American travel and tourism industry, as well as in the training topic, data was found online in international reviews, surveys and papers in different Trade magazines and various websites.

### 4.2.1 Online survey among travel professionals

A survey was conducted among travel professionals. The survey, set up on Google Form, was designed to analyze their needs and expectations in regard to interactive online learning courses from tourism destinations, as well as the level of satisfaction with the tool offered by Switzerland Tourism North America, the Switzerland Advisor Program. The goal was to find out how an interactive online learning course can help travel agents be more confident in selling the destination. The population sampled consists of North American travel professionals that already had at least one contact with Switzerland Tourism and, therefore, are registered in Switzerland Tourism's database. This sampling method enabled to reach easily travel professionals that sell Switzerland and its touristic products, or that have shown an interest in selling the destinations.

The online survey included fifty questions that were either closed or open, with sometimes the possibility of multiple choices answers. The online questionnaire was structured into six categories:

- Demographics of the respondents;
- Strategies of the knowledge acquisition;
- Participation or non-participation in an interactive online learning course about a tourism destination;
- Participation or non-participation in the interactive online learning course offered by Switzerland Tourism, the Switzerland Advisor Program;
- Acquired knowledge and satisfaction;
- Suggestions for improvements.

The survey used filter questions: depending on their answers, the respondents were redirected to other questions in order to find out more information on a particular topic. The survey is available in Appendix VII.

Respondents required approximately five to ten minutes to answer the online survey. In order to motivate and thank the respondents for taking the time to answer the questions, an incentive, presented as a sweepstake, was generously sponsored by Switzerland Tourism and Swiss Travel System. Respondents were able to give their contact information to enter for a chance to win two 8-day First Class Swiss Travel Passes, a Swatch watch and other Swiss giveaways. Anonymity was guaranteed to everyone and no data was used for any other purpose than the sweepstake or the interview.

An email (see Appendix VIII) asking the sample population to take part in the survey was sent out on Tuesday, June 16<sup>th</sup>, 2015 to 10,173 travel professionals. Experience shows that Tuesdays usually offer a better opening rate than Mondays or later in the week.

Since most of the people are very time poor and easily distracted, particularly in the case of emails, it was very important to create personalized and appealing texts, images and subject line. The major issue of an e-newsletter campaign is that many emails end up in a spam folder or are never opened by the receiver. The percentage of recipients who opened the email is called “open rate” (Peterson, 2004, p. 122). Another percentage of email addresses in the subscriber list, called “bounce rate”, does not receive the message because it was returned by a recipient mail server. This typically happens either if a subscriber leaves the company or is retired, or if the email address is misspelt (Google, 2015). Many factors influence these two measures, but according to Peterson (2004, p. 123), an open rate around 19% and bounce rate around 8,5% are typically measured in the travel and tourism industry. In the case of this email campaign, the bounce rate was 13%. Therefore, 8,811 valid recipients received the email, while it scored an opening rate of 24%, which shows an interest of recipients in taking part in the survey.

A reminder was sent out one month later, on July 16<sup>th</sup>, as part of the bi-monthly e-newsletter to the very same population (see Appendix IX). Recipients of the email were able to fill out the survey within the time frame of seven weeks; the survey was closed on August 4<sup>th</sup>, 2015.

The survey response rate corresponds to the number of questionnaires completed divided by the number of recipients. It varies widely and depends on a variety of factors, such as customer loyalty, brand recognition, incentives, invitation wording, perceived benefit from participating in survey, demographics and how actively respondents are engaged in the

improvement process, among other things. External surveys have an average of 10-15% response rate. It can fall below 2% when the respondent population is less targeted, when contact information is unreliable, or when there is less incentive or little motivation to respond (Fryrear, 2015). In this case, the survey response rate was 6%, essentially because of the high bounce rate.

Although the actual study provides valuable insights into travel professionals needs and expectations, the findings should be interpreted in consideration of the limitations mentioned in chapter 4.3.

#### **4.2.2 Individual interviews with travel professionals**

The online survey provides valuable information about the needs and satisfaction of travel professionals regarding interactive online learning courses. However, the level of satisfaction and, above all, the level of confidence in selling the destination are difficult to analyze with a quantitative research. Therefore, it was important to complete the results with a qualitative research in form of one-to-one in-depth interviews with travel professionals. The survey integrated a question about the willingness to participate in a short in-depth interview (maximum 20 minutes) conducted over the phone. 19 travel professionals agreed to participate in the interview; however, as interviews are time consuming and resource intensive, and as the interest rate has dropped when the author planed to conduct them, it has been decided to conduct seven interviews. They took place during the months of August and September 2015.

Ten open questions were part of the interview, with the aim of having more insights about the satisfaction of travel agents regarding interactive online learning courses, their level of confidence in selling the destination after having graduated, and new features that would help them being more confident. The protocol of the interviews can be found in Appendix X.

#### **4.2.3 Benchmark**

The online questionnaire and the interviews with travel professionals were completed by an external benchmark among interactive online learning courses offered by various companies from the travel and tourism industry. Benchmarking is the continuous comparison of products, services and processes between several companies (Staiger, 2014, p. 3). According to Voss, Ahlström and Blackmon (1997, p. 1047), benchmarking is the action of recognizing practices and performance criteria. The main goal is to have an overview of the competitors' situation, to learn how they work and finally to use these precious information to increase performance. During this study, the benchmark has been conducted to highlight the

best practices in the tourism industry in order to provide Switzerland Tourism North America with new ideas and recommendations.

Five companies were chosen to be benchmarked:

- **Rail Europe:** partner of Switzerland Tourism in North America and Swiss train tickets' official retailer in the market. It offers a comprehensive online learning course about the European train system, with specific chapters about French and Swiss trains.
- **Ticino Tourism:** Ticino Tourism – being a tourism destination of Switzerland – is the first and only Swiss region to offer an online learning course dedicated to travel professionals.
- **New Zealand Tourism:** with its unspoiled nature, beautiful landscapes, mountains and outdoor sport offers, New Zealand is often compared with Switzerland. Furthermore, New Zealand Tourism is considered as a leader in the industry and was among the first tourism boards to offer an online learning course (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 108). Its current course was considered in by Kalbaska (2013) as a best practice in her study “eLearning Courses about National Tourism Destinations: Destination Management Organizations' Offers and Travel Agents' Perceptions and Motivations”.
- **Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA):** the course offered by the Hawaii Tourism Authority was ranked by travel professionals best online learning course during the online survey. Therefore, it has been decided to analyze it in the benchmark.
- **Easyjet Airline:** the Swiss company E-teach was mandated by Easyjet Airline to design a training game. This training focuses on the fun aspect and offers travel agents a different approach of online learning.

In the framework of this benchmark, the author took all courses – for some, only partly – just as a travel agent would do. The time needed to complete the course, the interaction during the online learning process, as well as potential improvements that could be implemented in the Switzerland Advisor Program have been highlighted for each online learning program.

### 4.3 Limitations

Due to time constraints, only the online learning course offered by Switzerland Tourism North America – the Switzerland Advisor Program – has been analyzed. The previous program offered worldwide by the company's head office, the Switzerland Travel Academy (see chapter 2.4.3), has never been taken into account during this study. However, it is possible that the respondents to the online survey and the participants to the interviews have confused the two programs, as some of them might have also followed the Switzerland Travel Academy.

Another limit to take into consideration is that the participants in the survey were inclined to report positively to the researcher, since himself is not neutral, as he is working for the company. Furthermore, travel professionals that work actively and successfully with Switzerland Tourism might have been more willing to participate in the survey and give a positive opinion.

Lastly, this research has been realized within the timeframe of a Bachelor Thesis. Therefore, due to time constraints, the benchmark has been limited to five companies and has not followed a precise protocol. The author has taken the programs or part of them and has highlighted what he found relevant for this research in chapter 5.

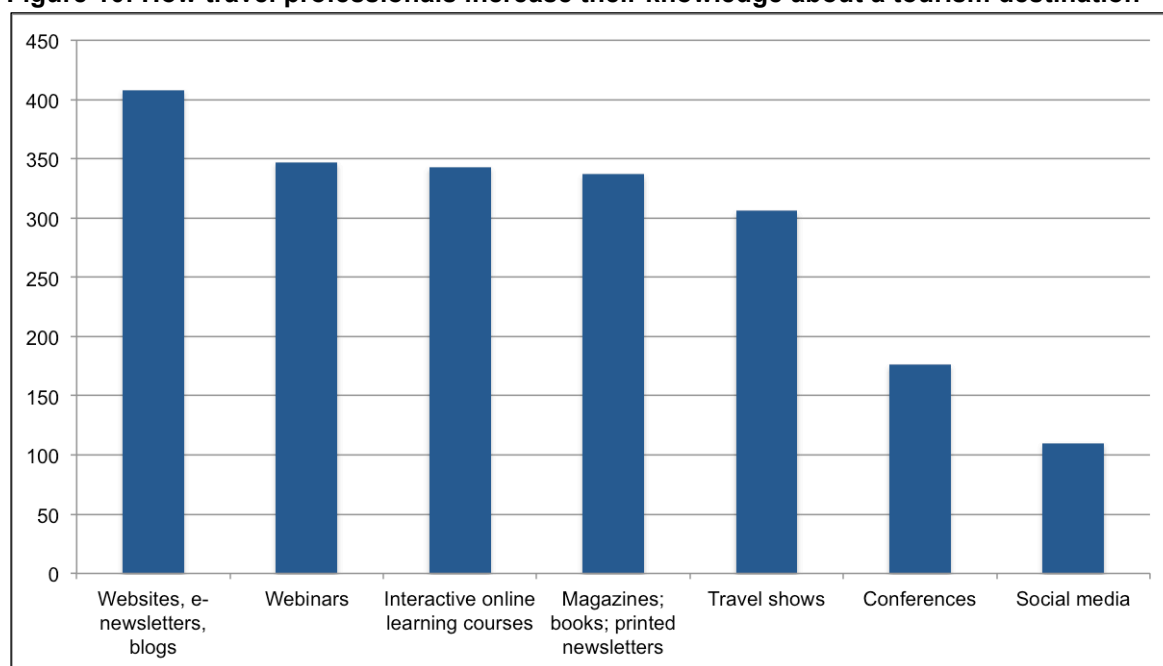
## 5. Summary of the results

In the following chapter, the results of the survey, the interviews and the benchmark are analyzed. As a first step, the survey's participants' profile is described and the results of the online survey are explored. Secondly, the findings of the in-depth interviews are summarized. Finally, the interactive online learning courses analyzed in the benchmark and the results are presented.

### 5.1 Results of the online survey

A total of 529 valid questionnaires have been received through the online survey, with two countries of residence represented: the United States (83%) and Canada (17%). Independent travel agents are the most represented in the panel (50%), followed by travel agents working for a tour operator (15%), and for a franchised travel agency (11%). Home-based agents represent 11% of the panel. 36% of the panel work for a company of over 20 employees, while 32% work for a company of 5 to 10 people, and 21% work alone. Most of the respondents are female (75%), over 50 years old (71%), and have worked in the travel industry for more than ten years (72%). This result confirms the profile of North American travel agents described in chapter 1.1.

Besides consulting the website of the destination, blogs and direct emails (408 mentions), the respondents confirmed that they increase their knowledge about a tourism destination by following webinars (347 mentions) and taking online learning courses (343 mentions). Reading books and magazines (337 mentions), as well as attending travel shows and conferences (484 mentions) are also important tools to stay up-to-date. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn, are not a significant way to improve their knowledge about a tourism destination; only 21% (110 respondents) affirmed that they use it (Figure 10). This result can be explained by the rather high average age of North American travel agents. 42 respondents affirmed that, when possible, traveling to the destination and discovering it themselves is the best way to improve their knowledge about it.

**Figure 10: How travel professionals increase their knowledge about a tourism destination**

Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

### 5.1.1 Enrollment in an interactive online learning course about a tourism destination

Among 529 respondents, 406 people (77%) have already been enrolled in an interactive online learning course about a tourism destination. Only 23% (123 respondents) have never been enrolled in such a program, mostly because they did not know about the possibility (44 respondents) or because they do not have enough time (43 respondents). Only 11 travel professionals answered that they were not interested in such online courses or that they were not convinced that taking a course would help their business.

The majority (47%) of the 406 travel professionals that have already been enrolled in an interactive online learning course spend on average between one and two hours a week for such trainings. Most of them (38%) have completed more than ten different online learning courses. This result confirms the importance of this tool among travel professionals to improve their knowledge about a tourism destination. Then, the respondents were asked to suggest up to three online learning courses they liked most. Beside the interactive online program offered by Switzerland Tourism – mentioned by 99 respondents – the most appreciated online learning courses offered by tourism destinations are the trainings produced by Hawaii (Hawaii Specialist Training, suggested by 50 respondents), the “Aussie Specialist Program” from Australia (46 mentions) and the “100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme” (37 mentions). The “Disney Travel Agents Program” (24 mentions) and the “Princess Cruises Specialist Program” (16 mentions) are the most appreciated courses among hotel companies, attractions and cruise lines. Regarding tour operators, Rail



Europe (6 mentions) and Globus Family of Brands (6 mentions) provide the most appreciated training programs. Table 2 shows the most appreciated online learning courses by categories.

**Table 2: Most appreciated online learning courses available in the travel industry**

Destinations			Hotels, cruises lines, attractions, etc.		
Rank	Company	Mentions	Rank	Company	Mentions
1	Switzerland	99	1	Disney Travel Agents Program / Disney College of Knowledge	24
2	Hawaii	50	2	Princess Cruises	16
3	Australia	46	3	Avalon Waterways	7
4	New Zealand	37	4	Viking River Cruises	7
5	Mexico	30	5	Cunard Cruise Line	5
6	Peru	27			
7	Ireland	25			
8	South Africa	25	Tour operators		
9	France	23	1	Rail Europe, Inc.	6
10	Germany	20	2	Globus Family of Brands	6
11	Austria	16	3	Abercrombie & Kent	5
12	Scandinavia	16	4	Sandals (Caribbean Specialist)	4
13	Jamaica	16	5	Tauck	2
14	Tahiti	16			
15	United Kingdom	14			

Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

The main reasons why travel agents suggested those particular online learning courses are because they feel that these courses brought them a better knowledge about the destination (354 mentions) or because they have learned where to find resources and information (259 mentions). 201 respondents feel that they have a better knowledge on how to sell the destinations, while 111 travel professionals mentioned that the course made them dream about the country or the region. Among other answers, travel professionals appreciated these trainings because they found them concise, fact-oriented and well illustrated. Furthermore, respondents also mentioned that taking such trainings allows them to be entitled to familiarization trips to discover the destinations personally, which is a great motivation.

Travel professionals who have already taken an online learning course were asked to give the three main reasons for their enrollment. The main reason for 389 respondents is to acquire knowledge about the destination. The second and third reasons are to answer their clients' need and requests (290 mentions) and to grow their business (182 mentions). For 108 travel professionals, to be listed on the destination's consumers website to get leads of new clients is the most important, and 81 respondents are taking such training in order to be

able to participate in familiarization trips. Only three respondents affirmed having been enrolled to respond to their manager's requests.

97% of the respondents affirmed that they improved their knowledge about the destination after having taken an interactive online course and 95% feel totally or somehow more confident in selling the destination, which again, proves, the importance of such tools for tourism companies.

For the majority (51%), the best duration of an online learning course is less than three hours, while 31% are willing to spend up to five hours for one course. Only 15% would be ready to spend more than five hours for an online course. This rather short amount of time can be explained by the fact that travel agents spend a lot of time on the phone with clients and have only little time to spend on training. Also, they have to know many different destinations and therefore, have to take trainings from many different companies.

Travel professionals were asked to indicate the three most interesting and valuable elements they take out of an interactive online course about a tourism destination (Table 3). The element that was ranked first is "general information about the destination" (281 mentions), including information about the geography, the language, the culture or the currency. The second element that travel professionals find informative and valuable is the main activities that tourists can do at the destination (e.g. information on museums, events, shopping or must-see). Then, travel professionals like information about the transportation system at the destination (160 mentions), and about where they can find more resources and answers to their questions (119 mentions). The information that respondents find less interesting and valuable is the contact information of tour operators and incoming operators featuring the destination (34 mentions), as well as special offers at destinations, such as hotel deals, promotion or special excursions (29 mentions). It is important here to highlight the fact that those are the elements that travel professionals did not find interesting and valuable in the online courses they have followed; it does not imply that this type of information is not relevant to them whatsoever.

**Table 3: What are the 3 most interesting and valuable elements you take out of an interactive online training course about a tourism destination?**

Answers	Total of respondents
General information about the destination (geography, language, culture, currency, food, etc.)	281
Main activities at destinations (museums, events, shopping, must see, restaurants)	246
Information about transportation system (price, tickets, how to get around, etc.)	160
To learn where to find resources and information about the destination	119
To discover local tips and insights	101
Top Selling Tips	97
To learn how to sell the destination	92
To learn about new products	45
To learn about tour operators and incoming operators featuring the destination	38
Special offers at destination (hotel deals, promotion, special excursions, etc.)	29

Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

### 5.1.2 Enrollment in the Switzerland Advisor Program

Among 406 travel professionals that have previously been enrolled in an online training course, 119 (29%) have started the online course offered by Switzerland Tourism, the Switzerland Advisor Program. 71% have never started this program, mainly because they have never been informed about this course: 54% affirmed that they have never heard about the possibility. The time resource is also an issue: 27% did not take the course because they have not had time yet. Only 8% are not interested in this training or not convinced that following this program will help them selling Switzerland. A reason could be that they have already followed another previous program on Switzerland several years ago.

As shown in Table 4, the main motivations for travel professionals to take the online training program offered by Switzerland Tourism North America correspond to the main motivations to take other programs about touristic destinations previously explored. The main reason for 163 travel professionals is to acquire a better knowledge about Switzerland or to become more confident in selling the destination and its touristic products. The third reason is to respond to their clients' needs and requests (61 respondents). Being able to participate in familiarization trips to Switzerland and to be listed on the consumers' website MySwitzerland.com to get leads of new clients are also important motivations (respectively 35 and 29 respondents). Only three respondents wanted to obtain CEU credits from The Travel Institute and from the Canadian Institute of Travel Counselor as main motivation and no one affirmed having taken the course in order to respond to their manager's requests. It is interesting to see here that taking the Switzerland Advisor Program is almost always a personal decision, not influenced by a manager or an incentive.

**Table 4: What were your 3 main motivations for taking the Switzerland Advisor Program?**

Answers	Mentions
To have a better knowledge about Switzerland	97
To get more comfortable in selling Switzerland to your clients	66
To respond my client's needs/request	61
To be able to participate in familiarization trips to Switzerland	35
To be listed on the MySwitzerland.com website as an official Switzerland Advisor travel agent and get leads of new clients	29
To sell more and earn more	25
To be certified as a Switzerland Advisor and expose official certification in my office	12
To be invited to exclusive Swiss events all over North America	9
To have the right to use the Switzerland Tourism Campus logo on your letters, brochures, website and email signature	5
To gain access to special offers	4
To enrich my resume	4
To win a competition	3
To get CEU credits from The Travel Institute and from the Canadian Institute of Travel Counselor	3
To respond my manager's requests	0

Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

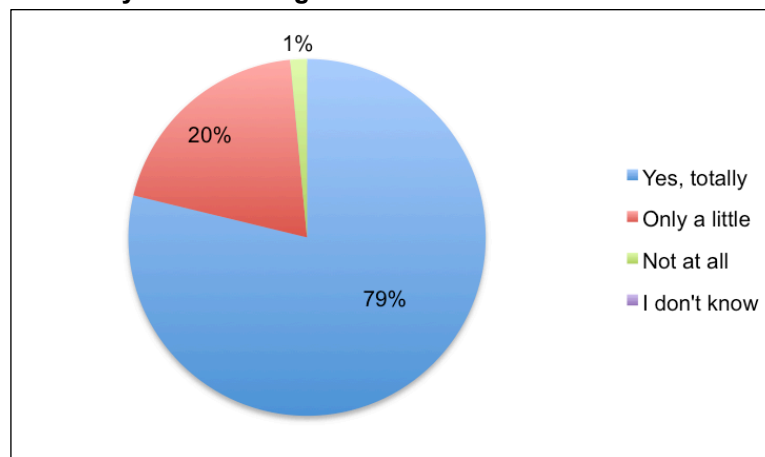
Out of the 119 travel professionals that have started the Switzerland Advisor Program, 66 (56%) have completed it and are currently certified Switzerland Advisors. Time is the main issue for travel professionals that have not completed the program yet (68%). As mentioned in chapter 2.4.3, the total dropout rate of the Switzerland Advisor Program since its launch in 2013 is around 60%.

### 5.1.3 Acquired knowledge and satisfaction level with the Switzerland Advisor Program

The online survey reveals that the overall level of satisfaction with the Switzerland Advisor Program is very high: 76% of the respondents are very satisfied and 20% are somehow satisfied. 79% of the respondents feel that they know a lot more about Switzerland since they have graduated (Figure 11).

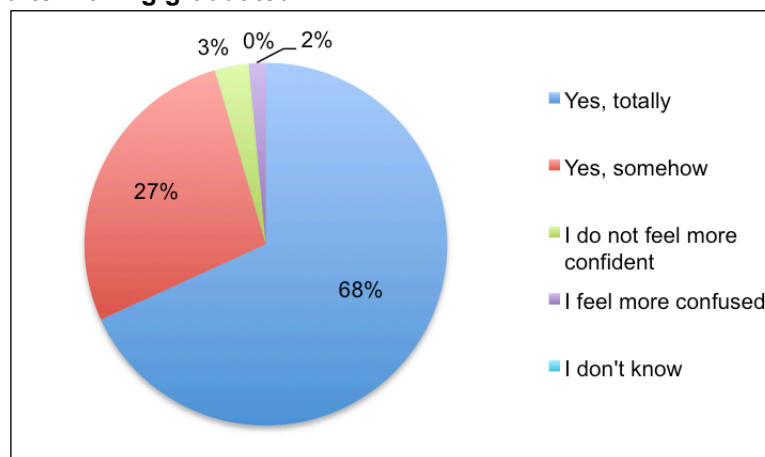
Figure 12 shows that 68% of the respondents feel way more confident" in selling Switzerland after having graduated and 27% of them feel a little more confident. Only 5% think that the program has not increased their confidence in selling the destination.

**Figure 11: Has the Switzerland Advisor Program helped you increase your knowledge about Switzerland?**



Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

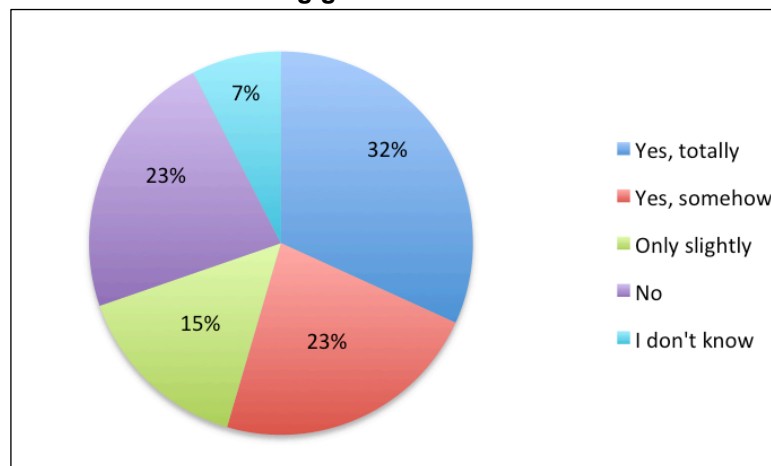
**Figure 12: Do you feel more confident selling Switzerland after having graduated?**



Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

However, the correlation between the level of confidence and the increase of the sales volume is difficult to prove. Figure 13 shows that 55% of the respondents think that they sell more this destination after having graduated. 15% affirm that their sales have only slightly increased, while 23% think that following the course has not helped them increase their sales. The difficulty to evaluate the sales increase can be explained by the fact that many travel agents take the Switzerland Advisor Program as a first step of their training about Switzerland. They also attend webinars, travel shows or read Switzerland Tourism's e-newsletter and, therefore, it is especially difficult for them to evaluate how this online learning course has actually helped them increase their sales. This question has been further investigated in the in-depth interviews with travel professionals (chapter 5.2.5).

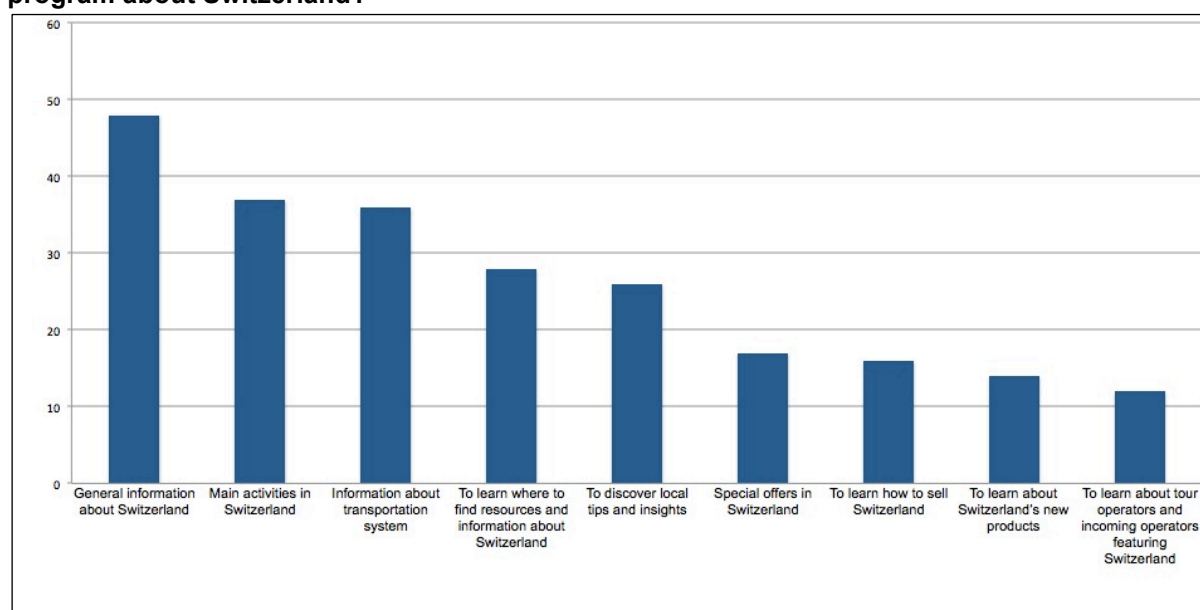
**Figure 13: Did you increase the sales of the destination Switzerland after having graduated?**



Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

To the question “Did you get the information you were looking for by taking the Switzerland Advisor Program?”, almost all travel agents (98%) answered either “yes, totally” or “yes, somehow”. As shown in Figure 14, the most valuable information that they are looking for in a course about Switzerland is general information about the country (e.g. about the culture, the language, the currency, etc. – 48 mentions), the main activities to do in the country (37 mentions) and information about the transportation system (36 mentions). They are also in need to know where to find resources and information about Switzerland (28 mentions) and would like to discover local tips and insights (26 mentions). Only 14 respondents affirmed that it is valuable to learn about Switzerland’s new products, and 12 travel professionals are interested to learn more about incoming operators based in Switzerland and North American tour operators that feature Switzerland in their tours.

**Figure 14: According to you, what information is the most important to find in an online training program about Switzerland?**



Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

The length of the program, currently around three hours, has been rated as “appropriate” by 82% of the respondents. 14% found it too long and only 4% would have enjoyed a longer program. The difficulty of the exam is also appropriated, according to 88% of the participants. The interaction during the online course has been rated positively. 67% answered “Yes, totally” to the question “Do you think that the course is interactive enough?”, and 29% answered “Yes, somehow”. Moreover, travel professionals appreciate the user-friendliness of the program, which has been rated positively on a scale of one to five (one = very easy to use and four = too complicated). 81% of the respondents have given the grade one or two (respectively 46% and 35%).

Furthermore, travel professionals were asked to suggest the features they liked the most and the ones they liked the least in the Switzerland Advisor Program. The features that respondents liked the most are pictures, mentioned by 46 of them, followed by the possibility to open an external link on MySwitzerland.com, mentioned by 44 respondents. 29 people appreciated the use of videos, while 24 respondents particularly enjoyed the quizzes.

To the question “Which features and activities did you like the least in the Switzerland Advisor Program?”, the majority (33 respondents) answered by “none”. 18 travel professionals did not appreciate the quizzes, while the exam was mentioned 12 times. It is interesting to remark that travel professionals have no clear opinion on these questions, as some features appear both in “liked the most” and “liked the least”.

#### 5.1.4 Suggestions for improvements

The online questionnaire also gathered suggestions for potential improvement with questions about new activities, a potential new and shorter online course about a specific topic, the possibility to take the course on mobile devices, as well as an open question to collect ideas from travel professionals.

New activities and features that travel agents would like to see integrated in the Switzerland Advisor Program rarely vary between respondents that have completed the courses and those who did not. 272 respondents suggested that the program should integrate more local tips and insights. Indeed, the search for authenticity and the desire to travel like a local is currently a big trend in the tourism industry. Interactive maps, as well as the possibility to ask questions to the Switzerland Tourism Trade Team directly in the program are functions that travel professionals would like to use during the course, with respectively 254 and 248 mentions. Videos are always appreciated, mentioned by 196 respondents. 98 participants would like more Drag & Drop games. Scenarios (a virtual discussion with a client) and serious games (immersion in a professional environment where learners must use their skills to carry out a mission) are features required by 83 travel professionals. The possibility to exchange information with other participants, for example in a forum, convinced only 69 participants.

The idea of a new shorter course (up to one or two hours) about a specific topic met great success. In total, 87% of the travel professionals that have not been enrolled in the Switzerland Program would be willing to be enrolled in a shorter course about a specific topic, while 80% of the certified Switzerland Advisors would be ready to start another one. According to Pappas (2013), focused lessons and short courses will most probably be a big hit in the future. Table 5, based on participants' answers, presents a synthesis of specific topics suggested by the respondents.



**Table 5: Topics suggested by respondents for a shorter online learning course**

Topic	Mentions
Transportation within Switzerland, Rail-based itineraries	85
Gastronomy, Food & Wine, regional specialties	36
Sample itineraries, day-trips packages	35
Art & Culture (incl. events, festival and traditions)	35
Accommodation (incl. booking and commissions)	31
Hidden gems and local tips, off the beaten tracks	28
Course about a specific destination	27
Ski & Winter activities	21
Hiking	17
Families, Multigenerational trips	11
Outdoor and adventure	9

Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

Rail travel is, with 85 mentions, by far the most requested topic. Travel professionals are interested in a course solely about transportation in Switzerland (how to get around, information about the different passes, etc.), as well rail-based itineraries. It is important to mention that Rail Europe, Inc. – one of Switzerland Tourism’s partners – offers an online learning course dedicated to rail transportation within Europe, with a specific chapter about Switzerland. This course is analyzed in the benchmark in chapter 5.3.1 and could be linked to the Switzerland Advisor Program. Gastronomy (Food & Wine) is the second most requested topic, with 36 mentions, followed by Art & Culture (including information about festival and traditions) with 35 mentions. 35 travel professionals would also appreciate a specific course with information to help them build an itinerary in Switzerland or combine other European countries with Switzerland. They also need recommendations for day trips and longer tours, as well as a listing of all existing packages: this topic is mentioned 35 times. The survey revealed that travel professionals need a specific course about accommodation, including how to book hotels and how much commission they would receive (31 mentions). The topic “Travel like a Local”, with information on hidden gems, traveling off the beaten tracks and local tips, appeared again with 28 mentions. 27 respondents would like more destination-specific online courses that give more in-depth information on one region or city. Travel professionals also requested online courses about specific activities: a course focused on winter tourism, including information about skiing and other winter activities, would interest 21 travel professionals. 17 respondents would appreciate a course focused on hiking, and 9 mentioned “Outdoor activities” or “Adventure tourism”. Finally, it is also valuable to know that trainings about “Family travel” or “Multigenerational trips” would be beneficial for travel agents (11 mentions).

Furthermore, a general open question was designed to collect new ideas and suggestions from travel professionals. Only 15 respondents used this question to give additional feedback, which shows the overall satisfaction with the program. The following table (Table 6) synthesizes the main suggestions from the respondents.

**Table 6: General suggestions from travel professionals**

Suggestions	Mentions
More familiarization trips	11
Specialization, options (focus on one topic instead of another one)	9
More intensive	7
Learn more about public transportation system (train passes, itineraries, etc.)	7
More local tips and hidden gems	7
More itineraries	6
Food & Wine	5
Art & Culture	5

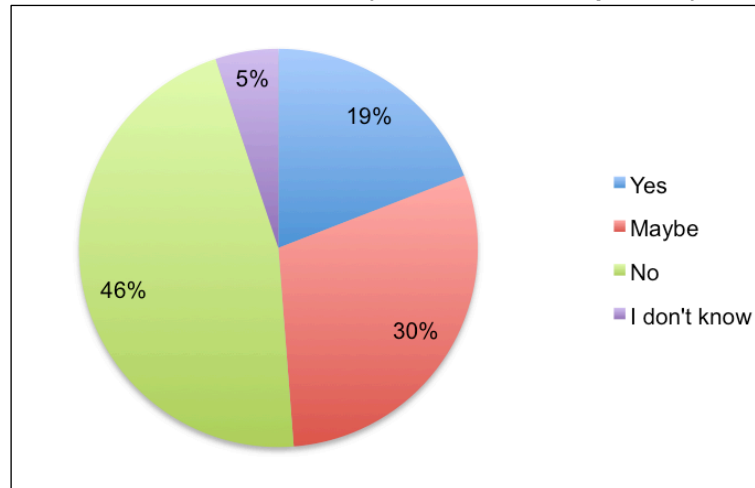
Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

The main suggestion is to offer more familiarization trips to travel agents that have completed the course, in order for them to have a better understanding of Switzerland, to meet the locals and to be more comfortable in selling the destination. Two respondents also mentioned that they hold information better by experiencing Switzerland themselves than by learning through a computer. Nine respondents suggested that the course should be more specialized; it should be possible to select an option to focus on one specific topic instead of learning other information that might be less important for their business. In the same way, seven respondents asked for a more intensive course that would go deeper into specific topics. Here again, respondents mentioned that they would love to have more local tips and discover hidden gems. They would also like to learn more about the Swiss public transportation system and the different passes, and about food, wine, art and culture. Finally, they would like more itineraries that they could use to create better packages for their customers.

The last part of the questionnaire aims to determine whether travel agents would more likely enroll in new interactive online learning courses if they were available on mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones. This possibility would allow people to work on the program during their commuting hours, on the train or on the plane for example. The large majority is not convinced that the possibility of taking the course on mobile devices would help them start new courses. Figure 15 shows that 46% of the respondents answered with “No”. “Maybe” was selected by 30% of the respondents and “Yes” only by 19%, while 5% did not have an opinion about it. This result can be explained by the rather high average age of travel agents based in North America. However, it is highly important that Switzerland

Tourism prepares an interactive online learning program that will suit the needs of the next generation of travel agents.

**Figure 15: Do you think that you would more likely enroll in new interactive online learning courses if they were available on mobile devices (tablets and smartphones)?**



Source: Data collected by the author (survey 2015)

## 5.2 Results of the interviews

In this chapter, the results of the in-depth interviews conducted with seven travel professionals are summarized in different sections, according to the protocol available in Appendix X.

### 5.2.1 Motivations to enroll in the Switzerland Advisor Program

The interviews confirm the results of the survey. The main motivation for enrolling in the Switzerland Advisor Program is to become more confident with clients and therefore, to gain credibility. Another motivation is to have a first contact with Switzerland Tourism, which would then allow travel agents to be eligible for familiarization trips, to be invited to local events and meet suppliers, or to receive special offers and discounts. The Switzerland Advisor Program is often seen as a first step in travel agents' education. Many of them already had basic knowledge about Switzerland before enrolling in it, and are expecting to learn more during webinars and potential familiarization trips. Learning and becoming more confident is achieved through a combination of different means.

For several travel agents, having clients eager to go to Switzerland was the motivating factor in enrolling in the program, in order to be able to give them better recommendation and, therefore, gain credibility.

### **5.2.2 Information retention**

Most travel agents admit having forgotten a large part of the acquired knowledge. The reason is that they did not have a chance to use this knowledge right after having graduated, or that they used it only a few times during the last years. Several travel agents mentioned that they feel that the course was a good start in the learning process, but they have learned more by doing research for clients and by putting together itineraries for them.

Moreover, several travel agents have the feeling that the course made them learn about regions or topics that they were not interested in, and therefore did not retain the information. They would rather spend more time on specific topics that are more useful for their business.

### **5.2.3 Confidence in selling and recommending Switzerland after graduation**

As the Switzerland Advisor Program is usually only one part of the learning process, it is difficult for travel agents to estimate the effect of this specific tool in gaining confidence in selling the destination. In general, travel agents feel more confident when they know where to find the required information. They also feel supported by the Switzerland Trade Team, which helps them with specific questions or issues. Travel agents feel that starting the process of learning about the destination is only possible if they have an interest themselves; this interest will lead them to do research and to become more confident with clients. Moreover, the Switzerland Advisor Program only gives them a basic knowledge. Confidence comes with practice: in other words, by advising and putting together itineraries for clients. The more clients they have with requests about Switzerland, the more confident travel agents will become.

### **5.2.4 Use of selling tips learned in the Switzerland Advisor Program**

All travel agents interviewed have already recommended a place or an activity to their clients after having learned a tip in the Switzerland Advisor Program. Many of them also mentioned that rail passes is a topic where they need the most tips and advices, as the offer is very wide. Also, travel agents mentioned that they learn more local tips during the webinars than with the Switzerland Advisor Program. This fact is easily understandable, as these webinars are held by Swiss representatives from the destinations, who can give more in-depth information.

Furthermore, the answers to this question confirm the results of the survey: travel agents are expecting more tips and insights from local people. They want to discover activities and places where locals go. Moreover, travel agents would appreciate to have the possibility to

focus on specific regions and topics during the learning process, in order to give better recommendations and offer added value to their customers.

#### **5.2.5 Sales increase due to the Switzerland Advisor Program**

Again, it is difficult to estimate the real impact of the Switzerland Advisor Program on the increase of the sales volume of the destination Switzerland. This can be explained by the fact that becoming a Switzerland Advisor is usually only one part of the learning process, and that the results in terms of clients' loyalty or new customers acquisition is a long process. However, all travel agents agreed that they sell more tours featuring Switzerland since they started the process of gaining knowledge about the destination. Several travel agents also mentioned that they feel more eager to suggest Switzerland instead – or in combination – of other European countries, because Switzerland is a destination that they know very well.

#### **5.2.6 Possibility of new resources**

Travel agents were asked if they need new resources in the Switzerland Advisor Program, as well as the format that would make them learn in the most efficient way. This question tries to find out what kind of interactive activities could encourage travel agents to enroll in this online course and would make them learn better.

Regarding the content, travel agents are expecting more insights and local tips. For instance, they would appreciate videos where local people tell them about their favorite place in the destination, or where they bring foreigners in the region. They would also appreciate being able to customize the program to have in-depth information about one specific topic or region, as customers that visit travel agents are usually very demanding.

Even though respondents answered in the survey that they find the program interactive enough, travel agents were very interested in improvements that the author suggested during the interviews. It seems clear that the current Switzerland Advisor Program lacks of scenarios and real-life situations; this makes learners quickly forget what they have learned. Travel advisors would be interested in having real-life missions, where they would have to deal with situations that they are likely to encounter with clients. For example, they would appreciate scenarios where they would have to choose the best rail pass for a client or the ski resort that suits him best. They also would appreciate to learn about Switzerland in a funnier way, meaning that the program should integrate more games and exercises. The exam is always a part that travel agents like less because it makes them feel like at school; they would prefer an evaluation in form of a game or having to deal with real-life situations.

## 5.3 Results of the benchmark

While following the online learning courses offered by tourism companies, the author has identified strengths and limits for each course. Each course is developed in this chapter.

### 5.3.1 European Rail Expert Training, offered by Rail Europe

Rail Europe is the leading authority of European rail in North America, representing more than 35 European railroads. It is a company privately own, with the Swiss Federal Railroads (SBB) and the French National Railroads (SNCF) as major shareholders. Rail Europe is partner with Switzerland Tourism North America for all railway related products and is the official retailer of all SBB train tickets in the United States and Canada. Its product range includes rail passes, train tickets, sightseeing passes and hotel and rail packages (Rail Europe, Inc., 2015).

Rail Europe offers an online learning program specifically designed to teach travel agents to promote and educate their clients about the benefits of European rail, in order for them to make it a part of their travel itineraries. Upon graduation, travel agents obtain the title of European Rail Expert (Rail Europe, Inc., 2014). Five chapters make up the program and cover the topics “Benefits of Rail Europe”, “Railway Experience”, “Booking process”, “Products overview”, as well as specific information about the main destinations sold by Rail Europe. A 20-question multiple-choice format exam intends to test the knowledge and certificate learners. Around one hour was necessary for the author to complete the course and pass the exam.

Two additional modules allow travel agents to get a better overview and product knowledge of the destinations Switzerland and France. A 6-question multiple-choice format exam allows learners to test their knowledge. An additional 30 minutes was necessary to complete each module.

#### **Strengths**

- With this online learning course, Rail Europe offers a good overview of all rail related products for the entire European continent. As North American travellers often combine several countries in the same trip, travel agents need to advise on different train transportation systems. Moreover, a module focused on Switzerland provides additional useful information that is only briefly explained in the Switzerland Advisor Program. This module could be a good combination to the Switzerland Advisor Program.

- Videos help give learners a better understanding. However, these videos come from an advertisement campaign from Rail Europe, targeted rather for end consumers than travel professionals. These videos promote the company and train travel in Europe rather than really giving selling tips that could help travel agents.

### **Limits**

- The online learning course offered by Rail Europe is very static and contains very little interaction. It is mainly texts that have to be read. Pictures play a decorative role rather than really illustrating something specific. It also contains tables with a lot of information that is difficult to remember. Referring to the classification suggested by Pappas in chapter 1.6.2, this online learning course offers a “passive interactivity level”.

Rail Europe’s online learning program does not take advantage of all the features offered by the modern technologies: all the elements may as well be presented on a printed document.

As many travel agents requested in the online survey a specific module focused on Swiss train, it is interesting to mention that such specialization is offered by Rail Europe. The Switzerland Advisor Program could redirect learners to this module, or even integrate it in its course. A cooperation between these two online learning programs could also be considered in the future.

### **5.3.2 Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist eLearning course, offered by Ticino Tourism**

Ticino Tourism is the official agency that promotes tourism in Ticino, one of the 14 Swiss touristic regions (Agenzia turistica ticinese SA, 2015a). It hosts a Trade Corner on its website, dedicated to travel agents (available on <http://trade.ticino.ch>). The most valuable information that can be found on this Trade Corner is a Sales guide for travel professionals, an online learning course, the Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist eLearning course, a list of hotels that cooperate with tour operators and packages that travel agents can book directly.

The goal of the “Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist eLearning course” is to help travel agents plan their customers’ vacation and get acquainted with Ticino as a vacation destination. It is designed for Ticino’s main markets: Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Holland, Belgium and Luxembourg, Russia, Great Britain, Brazil, Korea, China, the United States, Canada and India (Agenzia turistica ticinese SA, 2015 a and b). Ticino Tourism is currently the first and only of the 14 Swiss touristic regions to offer its own online learning course.

The course is divided in five brief modules, covering the topics “Discover Ticino”, “Selling tips”, “Culture and events”, “Excursions and nature” and “Rivers and lakes”. Each module requires approximately ten minutes of studying. In order to receive the Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist certificate (Figure 16), learners must pass the final exam by answering correctly ten multiple-choice questions. Altogether, around one hour was needed by the author to complete the whole program.

Ticino Tourism mentions that “Up to 10 Ticino Certified Travel Specialists will be eligible to participate in an annual study trip to Ticino” (Agenzia turistica ticinese SA, 2015b).

**Figure 16: Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist Certificate**



Source: Agenzia turistica ticinese  
SA (2015b)

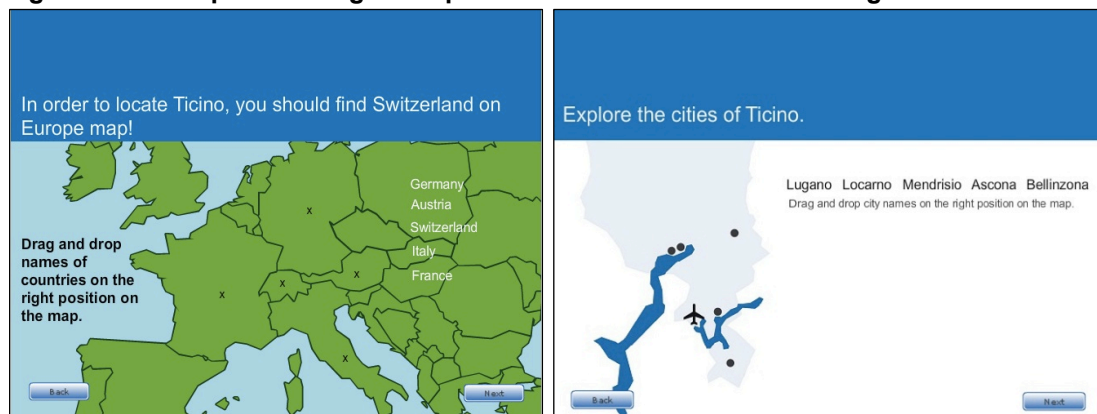
## Strengths

- As previously mentioned, Ticino Tourism is the first and only online learning course that was initiated by a local tourist office in Switzerland.
- The Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist eLearning course integrates short videos with interviews of specialists of the travel industry. Michael Maeder, former Director at Switzerland Tourism India and Director at Switzerland Travel Center, Simon Bosshart, Director at Switzerland Tourism China & Asia Pacific and Toovey Abraham, General Manager at Swisstours India explain what they love about Ticino, why Ticino is a great place for customers from their specific market, and give travel agents tips to sell Ticino to their customers.



- Ticino's online learning course makes a good use of interaction with Drag & Drop activities. For instance, instead of showing travel agents directly where Switzerland is located, learners have to drag and drop names of the countries on a map. This method is used several times during the course and forces students to think; therefore, they memorize the information more efficiently than by passively reading (Figure 17).

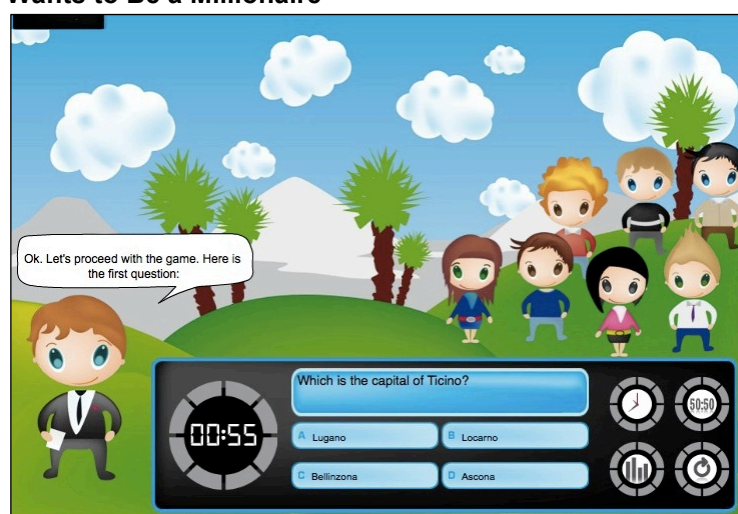
**Figure 17: Examples of Drag & Drop activities in the Ticino eLearning course**



Source: Agenzia turistica ticinese SA (2015b)

- Ticino Tourism added some fun in the learning process by using a mix of text, pictures, videos and quizzes. Participants should get the feeling of being in a game and therefore become more motivated in spending time in the course.
- The course focuses on benefits that travel agents can communicate to their clients. For instance, every time that an excursion is free of charge for Swiss Travel Pass holders, this benefit is mentioned in the course. This allows travel agents to give their customers great recommendations on how they can save money while in Switzerland. Furthermore, a short summary of the two or three most important points is presented at the end of each chapter.
- The ten multiple-choice questions of the exam are presented in a fun way, inspired by the television game show "Who Wants to Be a Millionaire". Learners need to find the correct answer – out of four suggested answers – to ten questions in a row, on an animated platform (Figure 18).

**Figure 18: Exam in form of the television game show “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire”**



Source: Agenzia turistica ticinese SA (2015b)

## Limits

- Content is neither adapted nor customizable to market needs. Moreover, no follow-up, such as webinars, is planned to keep improving travel agent's knowledge.

The Ticino Switzerland Travel Specialist eLearning course offers a good and short overview of Ticino, with useful selling tips for travel agents, in a fun and interactive way. It uses some features offered by online learning courses that provide added value compared to other learning techniques. As many travel agents suggested that trainings should be more specialized and focused on one region, this initiative could be encouraged in the future by Switzerland Tourism. A list of all available online courses on Switzerland could be added at the end of the Switzerland Advisor Program.

### 5.3.3 100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme from New Zealand Tourism

Tourism New Zealand (TNZ) is the national tourism organization, which is responsible for marketing New Zealand to the world as a tourism destination. According to Kalbaska (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 104), TNZ is the oldest DMO in the world, as it was established by the New Zealand Government in 1901. 120 staff work currently in two offices in New Zealand, Wellington and Auckland. There are eleven other offices around the world, including North America, symbolizing a strong presence of the destination in this market (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 107).

A Trade website (<http://traveltrade.newzealand.com>) was designed and developed by TNZ as a major component of the relationship with travel trade partners. The website has been created in order to collect all the resources that might be helpful for those selling travel in their daily activities (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 113). TNZ was awarded by the U.S luxury travel

network Virtuoso “Tourism Board of the Year 2015”, reflecting TNZ’s efforts to train, educate and inspire travel advisors in selling New Zealand’s luxury offering to the clientele (Kumar, 2015). The Trade website offers itineraries, marketing resources and an interactive online course, called “100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme”. The 100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme is believed to be one of the first online training programs provided by a tourism destination. The first idea of an online learning course appeared in 2003, while the implementation and delivery of the online training platform happened in 2004 (Kalbaska, 2013, p. 119).

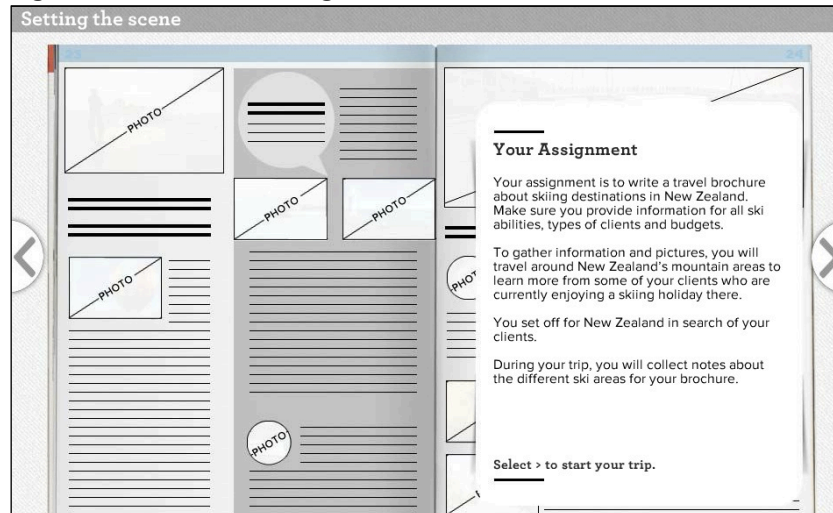
### **Description of the program**

The 100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme has been designed in 15 modules with general information about the country and information about the different regions and products (see Appendix XI). Travel advisors need to complete at least ten modules to become a “100% Pure New Zealand Specialist”. In addition, a stay of a minimum of three overnights in New Zealand during the last five years, as well as further educational trainings, such as webinars, local events or in-house training are mandatory to complete the process and obtain the certificate. The first two modules give an overview of New Zealand, its regions and accommodation offers. They give a general introduction with particular suggestions for travel agents to sell the destinations. The next nine modules cover each region and describe the tourism activities that can be undertaken. Four additional modules present practical hints to sell customizable experiences in New Zealand. These modules are called “Driving Safely in New Zealand”, “How to Sell Ski in New Zealand”, “How to sell New Zealand cruising” and “How to Sell Walking and Hiking in New Zealand” (Tourism New Zealand, 2015). According to Kalbaska (2013, p. 119), not all modules are offered in every market and some modules are also market specific.

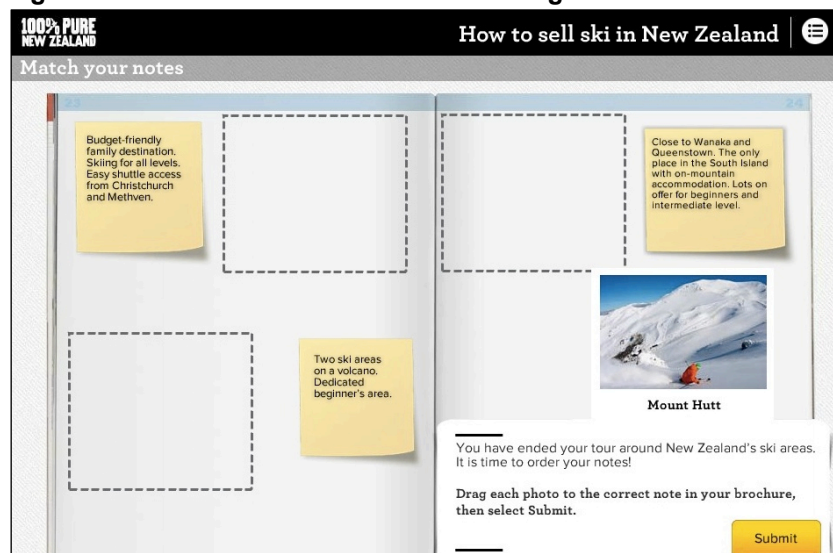
Each module requires two to three hours, which in total accounts for twenty to thirty hours. Learners need to read texts and observe associated images, which present the destination and its attractions. They can also watch videos about the destination or look at external links to enhance their knowledge.

### **Strengths**

- The 100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme adds a game dimension that makes the learning more fun. For instance in one module, learners’ assignment is to write a travel brochure about skiing in New Zealand. During the module, they gather information and collect notes. The exam consists in matching this information with pictures from destinations, in order to create the travel brochure (figures 19 and 20).

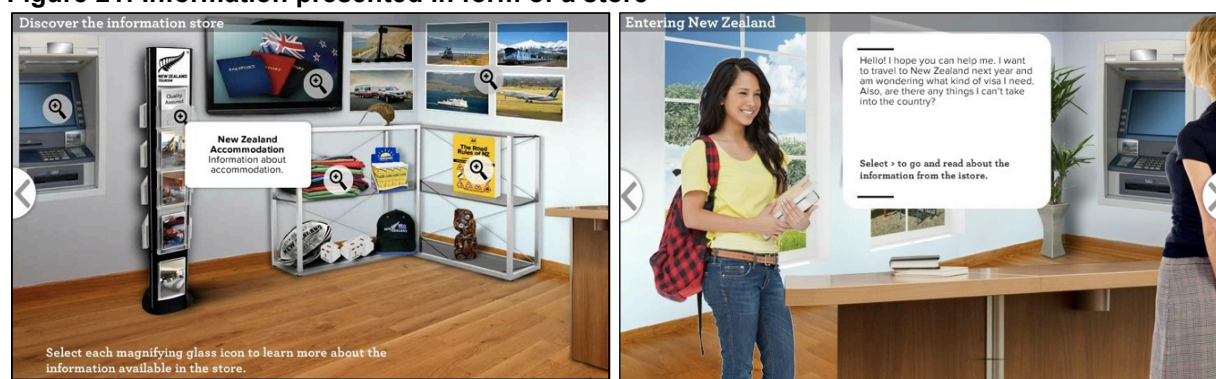
**Figure 19: Brochure assignment**

Source: Tourism New Zealand (2015)

**Figure 20: Exam in form of a brochure assignment**

Source: Tourism New Zealand (2015)

In another module, the information is presented in form of a store with different windows. Each window represents one topic. Then, a situation is presented with a client asking questions about one topic. Learners have to find the correct answer to satisfy the client's request (Figure 21).

**Figure 21: Information presented in form of a store**

Source: Tourism New Zealand (2015)

With this “gamification”, learners need to think and therefore, withhold more information. Furthermore, Travel New Zealand replaced the academic format of traditional exams with short and simple missions, which travel agents are likely to encounter in their daily work.

- Travel agents have to visit New Zealand themselves in order to complete the certification process. Even though this makes the certification more complicated, time-consuming and expensive, it allows travel agents to have a much more comprehensive understanding of the destination, and customers can relate to it much easier. Therefore, it increases the credibility of the title “100% Pure New Zealand Specialist”.
- Short modules allow learners to select what they really want to learn about. For instance, a travel agent who sells the destination only from time to time would be willing to spend only little time on such a course. It would surely focus on the specific topic or region he is selling. Another travel agent who is already familiar with the destination would need more in-depth information about one specific region or topic. This way, the course can be tailor-made according to the needs and desires of learners.
- Kalbaksa (2013, p. 119) notes that TNZ has decided to keep training content open to every user and not only to travel professionals. Hence, they hope to increase the overall awareness of the destination New Zealand not only among trade partners, but also among potential tourists and media.

## Limits

- 20 to 30 hours are required to complete the program. As travel agents are usually busy with clients and as they sell several destinations, the length of the course probably discourages them to finish it. The survey among travel agents (chapter

5.1.1) confirms that travel professionals are not willing to spend more than five hours in such programs.

- The mandatory stay in the destination is very helpful for the learners to have a better understanding of the destination. However, it makes the process of becoming a “100% Pure New Zealand Specialist” long, complicated and expensive.
- Kalbaska (2013, p. 119) notes that TNZ does not provide any special packages or discounts for the certified travel agents, which may also lead to the lower motivation to participate in the online training course.

#### 5.3.4 Hawaii Specialist Training

The Hawaii Tourism Authority (HTA) is the company in charge of the promotion of tourism in the Hawaii Islands. Beside the end consumer website, HTA offers on [www.agents.gohawaii.com](http://www.agents.gohawaii.com) a website dedicated to travel professionals. This Travel Agent Resource Center has been created in association with the Travel Agent University, from the Media group Questex, a company that works with tourism companies to help them educate travel agents. The travel professionals website works in the same way as the Switzerland Tourism Trade Corner, offering education, sales tools, marketing material and other useful resources for travel professionals.

HTA offers three different levels of certification. The first one, called “Hawaii Destination Specialist” contains two modules: “An Introduction to Hawaii” gives an overview of the destination, while “Selling the Hawaiian Islands” is a roadmap for expertly selling vacations to Hawaii. Upon graduation, travel agents will receive the following benefits: consumer referrals, access to specialist-only webinars, continuing Education Credits from The Travel Institute and use of the destination specialist logo (Hawaii Tourism Authority, 2015)

Agents who wish to expand their education online have the option of becoming a specialist for each individual island as well, by completing the “In-Depth Island Training Course”, which delves deeper into the destination’s six islands. Graduates of all six islands Certifications are credentialed as Hawaii Destination Experts and become eligible for more exclusive benefits, including access to an organizer for self-guided familiarization trips and priority invitations to Hawaii tradeshow and training events.

An additional level, the “On-Island Master Training”, for each individual island through a one-of-a-kind in-destination experience, will soon be released for travel agents who would like to distinguish themselves even further from their colleagues. To qualify, agents must complete the first two levels. Master Specialist Agents will be specially identified in the lead

generation program on the consumer website and get additional benefits (Hawaii Tourism Authority, 2015).

During this study, the two modules of the first level, the “Hawaii Destination Specialist Program” have been analyzed.

### **Level One – Hawaii Destination Specialist**

Two online certifications have to be completed in Level One. The first certification provides knowledge about the Hawaiian Islands in six chapters (“Overview”, “A Cultural Introduction”, “Geography, Transportation & Climate”, “Accommodations”, “Activities, Events, Food & More”, “Agents.GoHawaii.com”). The second certification is a roadmap for expertly selling vacations to Hawaii, which contains eight chapters (“Overview & Hawaii’s Uniqueness”, “The Hawaii Customer”, “The Bucket List Traveller”, “The Arts & Culture Traveler”, “Romance & Destination Weddings”, “The Golf Traveler”, “The Outdoor Recreation Traveler”, “Cross-Selling & Upselling the Island”). Upon completion of both certifications, travel advisors receive a Hawaii Destination Specialist Certificate, which is a prerequisite to go on to subsequent levels of the program.

The course is presented in the form of a slideshow, completed with voice-overs reading the slides, as well as videos. The users can move forward or take a pause whenever he would like. Each chapter is completed by a five-question multiple-choice exam; 80% or more of correct answers is required to go onto the next chapter. However, it is possible to re-take the tests several times. At the end of the last chapter, a final exam takes place with 15 multiple-choice questions. A minimum of 80% of correct answers is, again, required to obtain the certification. It took around three hours to the author to complete the first certification and another three hours for the second certification.

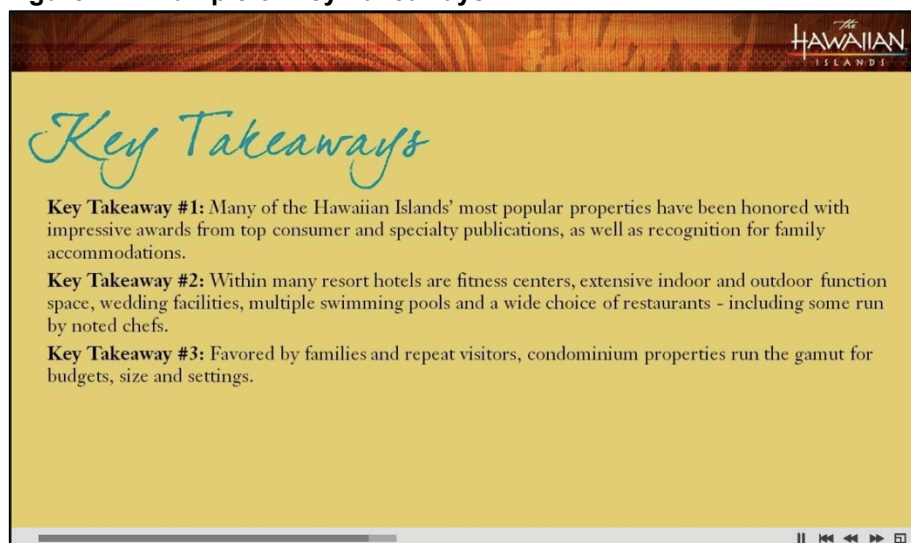
### **Strengths**

- One entire chapter focuses on selling the destination, including customers’ profiles (“The Art & Culture Traveler”, “Romance & Destination Weddings”, “The Golf Traveler”, “The Outdoor Recreation Traveler”) and tips on cross-selling and upselling the destination. For instance, the program suggests to include more than one island in a vacation to extend clients’ stay, to book more components, such as car rentals, hotel transfers or excursions or to alert clients about any special events that may be scheduled during their visit. These options are good for travel agents’ sales volume and will add new dimensions to the vacation experience and increase customer satisfaction.



- Travel agents can find all the information and resources they need on one single website: the Travel Agent Resource Center. This page is hosted by The Travel Agent University, which also created the Hawaiian Specialist Program. At any time, travel agents can find the schedule of upcoming webinars, order marketing materials for themselves or for their clients, or download more sales resources. All the components of the Hawaii Tourism Authority's training are created on the basis of the same layout, what makes it very user-friendly to travel agents. Furthermore, an entire chapter of the course is dedicated to the Travel Agent Resource Center: what resource is available, where travel agents can find information and how recommend and sell the destination. This chapter is particularly important because travel agents usually only have little time to answer customers' questions. They need to know within a very brief timeframe where to find information.
- Each chapter ends with a "Key Takeaways" that summarizes the main elements of the chapter (Figure 22). Travel agents also have the possibility to print these takeaways and keep them for future references.

**Figure 22: Example of Key Takeaways**



Source: Hawaii Tourism Authority (2015)

- The program is very user-friendly: learners only have to click on an arrow to display the next slide. There is no need to scroll up or down nor to drag and drop elements. Travel agents can even let the program run by itself and watch it like a movie. The Hawaii Specialist Program was the user-friendliest course tested during this benchmark.



## Limits

- The program does not interact with learners and does not take advantage of the possibilities offered by technology. It shows slides with texts, that a background voice reads without adding more comments. The only interactive content is a couple of short videos that show Hawaiian landscapes. Moreover, the program lacks of rhythm, what makes it easy for travel agents to give up. The Hawaii Specialist Program can be considered as “passive interactivity level”, referring to the classification presented chapter 1.6.2.

### 5.3.5 eJPro.com, offered by Easyjet Airline

In 2009, the Swiss company E-teach was mandated by Easyjet Airline to design a training game to raise travel agents’ awareness of the “Business offer” proposed by Easyjet in Switzerland and Germany (E-teach, 2009).

The concept of the game that they designed is a challenge between travel agents, which goal is to score as many points as possible. The game is organized in three different parts, which all cover one different topic: “Basic knowledge about Easyjet” (Overview, fleet, destinations, passengers), “Network” (Key figures, business offer) and “Business benefits” (Flexibility, benefits, price, safety). Travel agents can also prepare for the challenge by reading information about the three topics. It takes 10 to 15 minutes to read all the documentation, and each part can be completed in only a few minutes.

## Strengths

- By offering one year of free flights to the winner, Easyjet offers a great incentive to motivate travel agents to participate in its challenge.
- Instead of a traditional training platform, the course is presented as a game, with the goal to score more points than other travel competitors. The big strength of the game concept is to make travel agents learn without the feeling of studying. Easyjet’s training program does not include any exam. Even though the challenges are really short, travel agents are likely to take them several times in order to improve their score and beat a colleague. Furthermore, the format of the challenge forces learners to be active and remember the answers of each question.

## Limits

- Easyjet's training program focuses considerably on the game dimension and tends to forget the primary goal of such a program, which is to make travel agents learn information about products. It is likely that travel agents do not read the questions, but only remember the answers in order to save as much time as possible and get better scores. Hence, acquired knowledge is not really verified.
- The game does not force travel agents to put the knowledge gained during the challenges into practice. In order for them to get better scores, they will take the questions several times, instead of having to think and practice what they have learned.

The benchmark has shown that the interactive online learning tools available in the markets offer several levels of interaction, from a passive interactivity level to a total immersion. Even if a course can take the form of a game, it is important not to forget the main goal of such courses, which is the education and training of travel professionals. The benchmark has shown that an incentive and a competition between learners can be beneficial if the main objective is not forgotten: the right balance between game and learning is essential.

## 6. Discussion

This chapter summarizes the main findings of this study; based on those findings, recommendations are provided. In addition, strategies for future online learning courses are explored.

### 6.1 Analysis of the results

This research explored how Switzerland Tourism trains its North American travel agents with its interactive online learning course, the Switzerland Advisor Program. With a mixed method approach, it gathered information about needs and expectations of travel professionals regarding online training programs.

An online survey among travel professionals who are part of the Switzerland Tourism network in the United States and Canada has been conducted to evaluate the satisfaction level with the Switzerland Advisor Program, and to analyze whether this program helps travel agent in being more confident in selling the destination. Additionally, seven interviews have been conducted with certified Switzerland Advisors who filled in the survey, with the aim of providing an in-depth understanding from the travel agents' point of view. Finally, an external benchmark was carried out among interactive online courses offered by companies in the travel and tourism industry. The goal was to highlight best practices in order to address Switzerland Tourism North America (ST NA) recommendations on how to further improve its interactive online learning course.

The study showed that the tourism industry has been tremendously affected by the development of the ICTs, changing the way tourism professionals work. End consumers have an easy access to the information and have become very knowledgeable about tourism destinations. New booking channels have appeared, enabling clients to make reservations themselves and create vacations without the help of travel advisors. Therefore, travel professionals feel the need to increase their knowledge and train themselves in order to gain credibility and trust from potential clients. Being a certified specialist with skills about a specific destination enables travel professionals to have a strong advantage compared to their competitors.

The research proved that interactive online learning courses are widely used by travel agents. They are believed to be an efficient and cost effective tool that enables travel advisors to learn in a flexible environment from different geographic locations. For ST NA, the Switzerland Advisor Program is an effective training tool. The investment in terms of time and money to create such an online learning course and to keep it updated can be high, but

it allows reaching a high number of travel professionals. The Switzerland Advisor Program, which offers a wide overview of the destination, is usually considered as the first step for travel agents who would like to gain knowledge about Switzerland and increase their credibility. Moreover, it helps ST NA create a network of travel advisors: the partnership with the Travel Agent Academy helps Switzerland Tourism build partnerships with travel advisors in North America.

From the perspective of travel agents, the Switzerland Advisor Program allows them to learn in a flexible environment while staying at work or at home. The study showed that online learning courses are usually only one step in travel agents' learning process and that they usually combine it with personal research, webinars or familiarization trips. The survey revealed that travel agents are satisfied with the current Switzerland Advisor Program, while pointing out that improvements could significantly increase the motivation, the skills acquisition and the confidence of travel professionals in selling the destination.

It has been proven that interaction increases the learning retention: learning while having fun encourages travel professionals to enroll in an online learning course. In order for travel agents to remember what they learn in the long-term, the program should be more interactive and include real-life scenarios to replicate situations that they are likely to encounter with customers. The program should also add some fun elements, such as games or challenges, in order to increase the learners' motivations. Serious games are probably the future of online learning, as they include all these elements. However, learning is the main objective, which should always be kept in mind in the creation of online learning courses. Regarding the content, travel agents expect more in-depth information about specific regions or topics, in order to give better recommendations to their clients. They also wish to obtain local tips and insights, which would allow them to gain credibility and trust from the customers, as well as differentiate themselves from competitors. Altogether, these elements would increase the level of self-confidence of travel agents in selling Switzerland.

As a general conclusion, it can be said that interactive online learning courses are a valuable and cost effective tool widely used by travel agents to increase the product knowledge and the confidence in selling a tourism destination. Modern technologies offer new possibilities of interaction between computers and learners, which increase the motivation and the retention, and can best prepare learners to real-life situations.

## 6.2 Recommendations and improvement s

This chapter gives ST NA recommendations based on the analysis of the results, regarding both the form and the content of the interactive online training program. Other tourism destinations can also take these suggestions as general recommendations.

### 6.2.1 Form

#### Interaction

As it has been shown in the literature and proved in the research, the more learners interact with the program, the more they learn. To do so, online learning courses should integrate the following features:

- **Interactive activities:** interactive activities, such as Drag and Drop games, interactive puzzles or True/False quizzes will facilitate the learning process and motivate the learners. These activities help learners assimilate the information: they not only read the information, but also have to process it.
- **Videos:** videos can be used to give more rhythm to the program and to give a better understanding of what travelers can expect in Switzerland. The videos have to be short, up to one or two minutes maximum. For example, videos could be used for local people to show their highlights and explain why they like these places.
- **Links to external resources:** links to external resources, such as websites, offers or brochures will create curiosity. Learners can open external resources to obtain deeper information, to order brochures for themselves or for their clients, or to discover tours and packages featuring Switzerland.
- **Scenarios:** the author suggests using scenarios to test the acquired knowledge instead of traditional exams. Scenarios force learners to immerse themselves in real-life situations that they are likely to encounter in their daily work. Furthermore, the game aspect of scenarios increases learners' motivation. The two following ideas can be used as scenarios to test travel agents' knowledge. They are inspired by the online learning course developed by Expedia about the New York destination<sup>1</sup> (Figure 23 and 24):

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<sup>1</sup> Expedia New York Destination e-Learning, available on <http://resources.alleninteractions.com/online/demos/expedia/course/expediamenu.html>

## A) Can you name it?

**Assignment:** A client is on the phone and cannot recall the name of a region or city. If travel agents think they know it, they can click it on a map. If not, they can click on “Ask for more information” to get another clue from the client. However, each time the learner does that, he extends the length of the call, and other clients may begin to stack up “on hold”; travel agents have to guess the answers using the fewest clues possible; at each wrong guess, the clients’ confidence will decrease. In this game, learners have to guess as many answers as possible in a limited timeframe, while keeping the highest level of clients’ confidence as possible.

**Figure 23: Example of “Can you name it?” scenario**



Source: Allen Interactions (2015)

### Example of clients:

- *“I’ve been to Switzerland three years ago. I stayed with my wife at a hotel called “Baron Tavernier” but cannot remember exactly where it was. The view on Lake Geneva was stunning. We had several wine tastings and met wine growers. Oh yes, this region was a UNESCO World Heritage site.”*

**Answer:** UNESCO Lavaux Region

- *“We went to the Bayeler Foundation, but I can’t remember the name of the city. This city has so many museums. I heard it has the highest concentration of museums in Switzerland. I remember this city hosts several pharma companies. We arrived there after a cruise on the Rhine river from Amsterdam”*

**Answer:** Basel

These scenarios test the knowledge of learners in a real-life situation, as many clients do some research on the web before visiting a travel advisor, but only have a rough idea of the destination. It also trains soft skills, such as the need to give precise answers to increase

clients' confidence. By allowing a short timeframe, it puts travel agents in stressful situations that they are likely to encounter.

The second suggested scenario asks learners to build a dream vacation for their clients:

## B) Build the dream vacation

**Assignment:** A client is on the phone, looking to book a trip to Switzerland for the first time. He has checked on the Internet, but is hoping for some recommendations. He is not sure where to stay and what to do while there.

In this scenario, travel advisors have to learn about the caller and use their knowledge of Switzerland to book that perfect trip. They are also able to add those extra touches that will bring the client back to them again. To complete these activities, learners have to:

- Read a client's profile and his or her quotes;
- Build the client's trip by selecting an accommodation, a Swiss rail pass or rental car, an itinerary and activities;
- After having booked the trip, learners get the client's feedback on his choices. If any parts are wrong, they can try to fix the parts they missed until reaching the client's satisfaction.

**Figure 24: Example of "Build the dream vacation" scenario**



Source: Allen Interactions (2015)

## Example of clients:

- *John, 35 years old, wants to go one week to Switzerland for skiing with two friends. They want to spend as much time as possible on the slopes and are looking for a resort with an international character, good snow conditions guaranteed and a crazy*

*nightlife. Regarding accommodation, a modern three-star and centrally located hotel would be perfect.*

**Possible answer:** Travel agents can use the “Ski resort finder” available on MySwitzerland.com<sup>1</sup> to help them. Several resorts can be suggested to John and their friends, for instance Verbier, St. Moritz, Zermatt or Laax. According to the chosen resort, one or two hotels can be recommended to John. The Swiss Transfer Ticket is the best option for the transportation. It allows traveling from a Swiss border railway stations or airport to the vacation destination, and then back at the end of the trip.

- *Bob and Kim would like to spend two weeks next summer in Switzerland with their two children (14 and 11 years old). They would like to see the mountains, take a panoramic train and visit cheese and chocolate factories. They would like to stay in three or four different places and do day trips from there.*

**Possible answer:** Travel advisors can recommend them to flight into Zurich and finish their trip in Geneva. In between, several cities and regions can be suggested, such as Lucerne, Interlaken or the Ticino. The region of Gruyere could be an excellent choice to visit cheese and chocolate factories. Part of the journey can be done in panoramic trains. Hotels and activities can be chosen with the help of the MySwitzerland.com website. Two 15-day Swiss Travel Passes for the parents, including the free family card, is a great combination, since it enables children to travel for free with their parents. Additionally, the Swiss Travel Pass offers free entrance to more than 480 museums.

These scenarios correspond to the daily tasks of travel agents: understanding the needs and expectations of clients and suggest them an itinerary with transportation, accommodation and activities. By giving additional tips, this assignment also shows travel agents how they can differentiate themselves from their competitors. It also shows learners where to find resources that can help them.

### **Need to visit the destination to achieve a higher level**

The Switzerland Advisor Program takes around three hours to be completed. It allows travel agents to increase their knowledge of Switzerland and to get certified within a short amount of time. However, the title of Switzerland Advisor only gives basic knowledge about the destination. Additional efforts are expected to become more confident in recommending

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<sup>1</sup> <http://winterfinder.myswitzerland.com>



and selling the destination, such as attending webinars or personal research. The current set-up does not make any differentiation between agents that follow additional training after having graduated and agents who do not.

As travel professionals confirmed that visiting a destination themselves is the best way to get familiar with it, the author suggests that ST NA offers a different title and certificate to travel advisors that have actually visited Switzerland during the last five years. The title of “Switzerland Specialist” could be used for those travel advisors, which would offer them additional value and increase their credibility.

### **Responsive design for mobile devices**

Even though the current generation of travel agents who sell Switzerland seems to have only little interest in mobile devices, such as tablets and smartphones, Switzerland Tourism has to prepare for the next generation of travel agents. Interactive online learning courses should be usable on every device – desktop computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones. This means that users should not have to scroll down or up on the screen, and texts and images should be big enough to be read and seen on small screens. Furthermore, users should be able to start the course on a smartphone, while commuting for instance, and continue it on a desktop computer in a later stage. Moreover, additional features, using the specific functionalities of smartphones and tablets – touchscreens and rotation functions for instance – could be used to further increase interaction with users.

### **Adaptation to other markets**

As mentioned in chapter 2.4.3, Switzerland Tourism offers another online learning course worldwide, the Switzerland Travel Academy. Only one interactive online learning course worldwide, instead of having one specific tool in each market, reduces the investment and facilitates the management. However, its content needs to be adapted on the basis of markets’ specifications. Furthermore, a solution implemented in partnership with a local supplier, which is well implemented in the market, such as the Travel Agent Academy in North America, enables to reach a higher number of travel advisors and to build a long-term relationship with them.

Therefore, the author suggests Switzerland Tourism to develop the content globally at head office in Zurich, while each market should look into local suppliers that have an existing network of travel advisors. This solution allows markets to reach a high number of travel professionals and build a network of Certified Advisors, while saving time and money with the implementation and realization of the content. Part of the course will need to be adapted according to the specific needs of each market.

## 6.2.2 Content

### Focus on how to sell the destination

The Switzerland Advisor Program should focus more on selling the destination rather than on pure knowledge about Switzerland. It seems more important to travel agents to have practical information, such as where they can find resources, where they can book hotels or how they can calculate the travel time between two places, than knowing the history of the country or detailed information. At the end of the course, travel agents should:

- Know where to find additional information about Switzerland and who they can contact for additional help;
- Know the train passes and be able to advise clients on a pass that suits their needs;
- Be able to list five packages featuring Switzerland that they can sell to their clients;
- Be able to list five tour operators in North America and three incoming operators in Switzerland that they can work with;
- Be able to put together a package including train passes, accommodation, transfers to the hotel and various activities.

To reach these goals, the author recommends ST NA the following:

### Different modules on different topics

The current Switzerland Advisor Program only gives basic knowledge of Switzerland. Many travel agents are willing to delve deeper into specific topics or regions, in which they have more interest or for which more clients' requests. Therefore, the author suggests splitting the program into several modules, with some mandatory and some optional ones. The learning course offered by Tourism New Zealand is a good example, with a requirement to pass 10 out of 15 modules. Based on travel agents' needs and the benchmark made within other online learning courses, the author suggests the following mandatory modules:

- **Welcome to Switzerland:** this module gives basic knowledge of the country (geography, languages, culture, currency, etc.)
- **How to get around in Switzerland:** this module focuses on the public transportation system in Switzerland and helps travel agents choose the best pass for their clients. It also shows the best panoramic journeys. Additional information on driving is also given.
- **Where to find additional resources and how to book Switzerland:** this module presents the resources offered on the Trade Corner (webinars, itineraries, brochures,

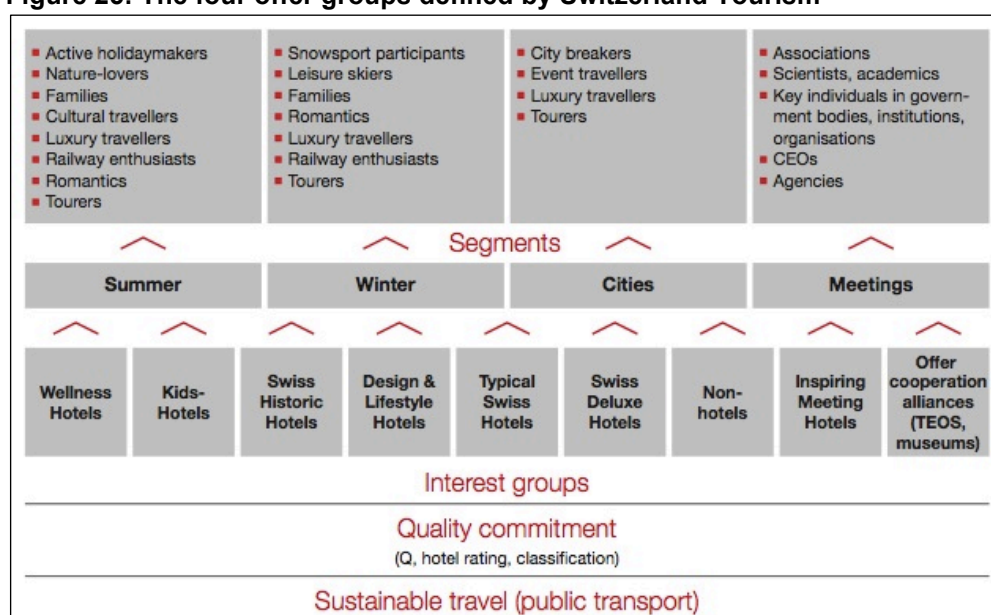
etc.) and shows travel agents where and how they can book Switzerland (tour operators offers, hotels, commissions, etc.).

- **How to create the best vacation for your clients:** in this module, travel agents discover Switzerland's highlights and how to put them together in an itinerary. This chapter also gives recommendations on accommodations and suggests ideas for day trips. Furthermore, this module shows how travel agents can combine Switzerland with neighboring countries.

Additionally, the author suggests the following eight optional modules. Travel agents should pass at least four of these modules to get certified.

These modules are inspired by the results of the online survey, as well as the offers portfolio developed by Switzerland Tourism in its Medium-Term Planning 2016-18 (Switzerland Tourism, 2015c, p. 21) and presented in Figure 25.

**Figure 25: The four offer groups defined by Switzerland Tourism**



Source: Switzerland Tourism, (2015c, p. 21)

- **Skiing in Switzerland:** this module is designed for travel agents who wish to sell vacations to snow sport enthusiasts (skiers and snowboarders). It gives tips on resorts and accommodation and shows the most efficient ways for these travelers to travel within the country.
- **How to sell winter in Switzerland:** in this module, travel agents discover winter activities for travelers who do not ski, e.g. hiking, dog sledging, visiting Christmas markets and shopping.

- **How to sell summer in Switzerland:** this module focuses on the summer season and has to be adapted depending of the main seasonal theme chosen by Switzerland Tourism for its Summer Campaign. 2016 will focus on touring with “The Grand Tour of Switzerland” as main product, while 2017 and 2018 will focus on the active responsible nature lover with “Wonders of Nature” as main topic (Switzerland Tourism, 2015c, p. 22).
- **How to sell Swiss Cities and Art & Culture:** learners discover how to prepare a vacation for city breakers. They will learn about the best cities and what makes them unique. They will also gain knowledge about museums, architecture, design, events and music. Additional information on city accommodation (Boutique and design hotels for instance) will be presented.
- **Outdoor activities and soft adventure in Switzerland:** the main target of this module are travel advisors who sell vacation to outdoor enthusiasts with sporting interests, with suggestions for hikers, touring cyclists and mountain bikers.
- **Families and multigenerational trips:** according to E. Crabill, (PC, June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015), patchwork families and multi-generational travel is a growing trend in the tourism industry, especially in North America. Seniors enjoy traveling and spend more money year after year. They also like traveling with their grandchildren and their family. The multigenerational demographic is a demanding target group, as multiple needs and interests must be satisfied simultaneously. This module gives travel agents ideas for activities that suit both children and adults, with family accommodation, tips and best deals to make the most of the trip.
- **Luxury Switzerland:** with a growth rate of 48%, luxury trips abroad have been the fastest growing form of travel over the last five years. Most luxury travelers come from the United States and China (IPK International in Switzerland Tourism, 2015e). This module focuses on five-star and Historic Hotels, haute cuisine, high-end events and activities. It will target travel agents that have indulgent connoisseurs who seek special and authentic experiences as clients.
- **Food & Wine in Switzerland:** this module gives in-depth information about the food and wine culture in Switzerland. It also recommends the best places to taste Swiss specialties and suggest itineraries for foodies.

Switzerland Tourism should not develop modules or chapters about one specific region, but, instead, should encourage local tourism organizations to design their own online learning course. To promote them, the courses offered by the regional destinations should be listed at the end of the Switzerland Advisor Program. As mentioned in chapter 5.3.2, Ticino Tourism is currently the only Swiss destination offering such course.

### **Local tips**

The survey clearly shows that travel agents are looking for tips and insights from locals. This could be implemented in the interactive online learning course through videos where residents of different regions show the places they like the most and explain the reasons. Swiss people could also tell travel agents why they take the train everyday and give them some advices. Local tips should also be developed in webinars, in order to give additional information to travel agents that pursue the training process.

## Conclusion

The study has proven the research hypothesis: more interaction in the online learning process will allow learners to retain more information. Interaction in form of scenarios and real-life situations prepare travel professionals' to situations that they are likely to encounter with future clients and therefore, make them more confident in selling the destinations. Moreover, the importance of interactive online learning courses for tourism destinations has been highlighted and needs and expectations of travel professionals' have been better understood.

On the basis of the online survey, the in-depth interviews and the benchmark, recommendations for a future development of the online learning course offered by Switzerland Tourism North America have been formulated. Interactive online learning courses should use the technologies available nowadays to make the learning process as interactive, fun and efficient as possible. They should focus on improving selling skills instead of pure knowledge about a destination. Furthermore, a tailor-made program can answer the different needs of travel agents, allowing them to gain in-depth knowledge about a specific topic. Finally, travelers would like to live local experiences and this topic should be reflected in such courses.

Although this research generates best practices for Switzerland Tourism, the results should take into account the following limitations: the study was limited in time and the benchmark has been limited to five companies and has not followed a specific protocol. The goal was to highlight some ideas that the author found interesting. Moreover, the research was conducted by an internal employee of the company, which might have influenced the answers and motivations of respondents to the online survey and interviews.

Future research could explore further online tools that Switzerland Tourism could use for the training of travel agents. An extended benchmark of companies using interactive online learning courses could be conducted – and not limited to the tourism industry. The software used by these companies would be a key element to take into consideration, as it highly influences the level of interaction that can be offered. Future research should also investigate serious games; this kind of learning tools, combining game with education, are probably the future of online learning, as they increase the knowledge retention and the learners' motivation. Additionally, future research need to be conducted to find out how Switzerland Tourism could implement interactive online learning courses in each market in the most efficient way.

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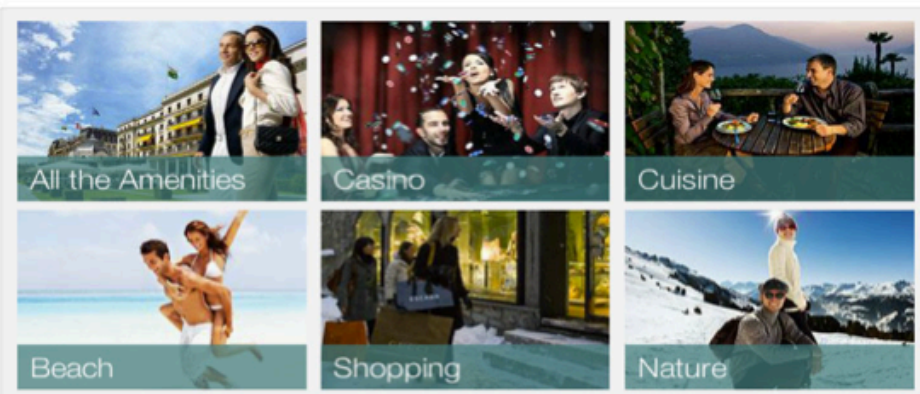
## Appendix I – Interaction in online learning courses

### Drag and Drop

**Pop Quiz!**

Select the images that reflect the **primary** interests of a Switzerland traveler.

Submit Answer



The quiz interface features a red header with the text 'Pop Quiz!' and a white instruction box below it. To the right of the instruction is a 'Submit Answer' button. Below the instruction is a grid of six images, each with a label underneath. The images are: 1. A couple standing in front of a large building (All the Amenities). 2. A group of people at a casino table (Casino). 3. Two people sitting at a table eating (Cuisine). 4. A couple on a beach (Beach). 5. A person shopping in a store (Shopping). 6. A person standing in a snowy mountain landscape (Nature).

Source: Byrne (2014, p. 14)

### Drag and Drop

**LET'S REVIEW...**

Click and drag each region that Windstar travels to in 2014 onto the world map.



SUBMIT ANSWER

The review interface has a blue header with the text 'LET'S REVIEW...'. Below it is a white instruction box. To the right of the instruction is a list of regions, each preceded by a sailboat icon. Below the list is a world map. At the bottom is a green 'SUBMIT ANSWER' button. The regions listed are: Asia, Arabia, Australia, Black Sea, Caribbean, Panama Canal, Greek Isles & Turkey, Mediterranean, Tahiti, and Northern Europe.

Source: Byrne (2014, p. 14)

## Matching

**Pop Quiz!**

Match each TravelSafe travel protection item with an aspect of each.

Pre-X Waiver	Covers cancelled shore excursions, sightseeing tours, entertainment tickets
"Cancel For Any Reason" CFAR	Requires you cancel at least 2 days or more before departure
Hurricane Warning	From restaurant recommendations to medical emergencies
On Trip Purchase Protection	Applies even to customers 80+, when purchased within 21 days of trip deposit
24-Hour Travel Assistance	Covered reason for trip cancellation (NOAA Cone, within 24 hours of departure)

Submit Answer

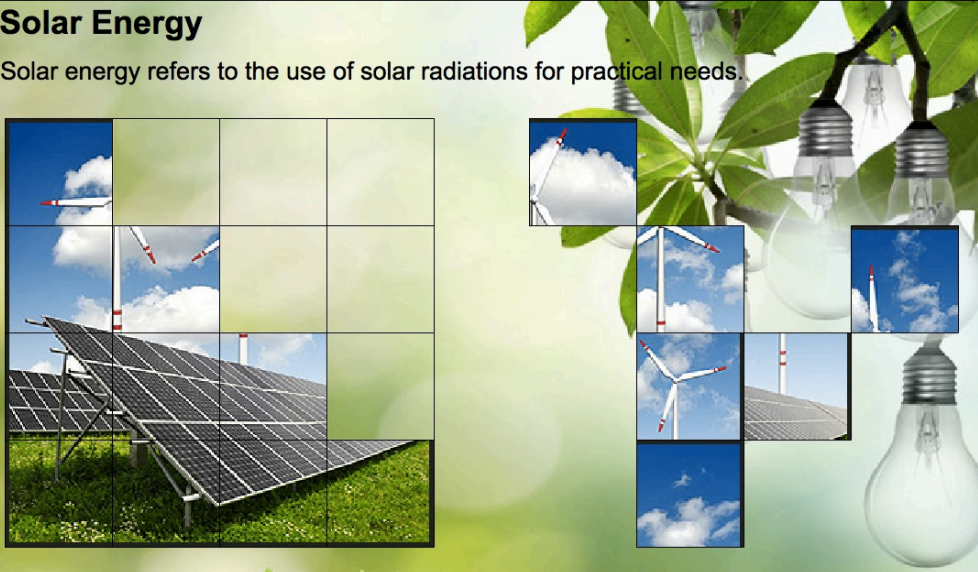
Source: Byrne (2014, p. 15)

## Interactive Puzzle

Harbinger Knowledge Products Pvt. Ltd. (2015). *Interactive learning templates beyond the essentials*. Retrieved from <http://www.raptivity.com/raptivity-suite>

**Solar Energy**

Solar energy refers to the use of solar radiations for practical needs.



Drag and assemble each piece of the image on the blank squares to solve the jigsaw puzzle



## Scenarios

The first example is a scenario developed for the tourism industry by the Travel Agent Academy.

**POP QUIZ**

Your client needs help! Select the best answers.

**Submit Answer**

My wife and I, and both our parents, are wine lovers and enjoy touring vineyards; is that a possibility in Israel?

- ☐ Yes, in fact I can add-on some fabulous tasting excursions into your Galilee and Golan Heights tour
- ☐ No, but there are several restaurants along the way that I can recommend that are noted for their extensive wine lists
- ☐ Yes, there are hundreds of wineries in Israel and the driver/guide I arranged for you is an expert on the wine routes

Source: Byrne (2014, p. 15)

The second example aims to give product knowledge and trains customer relation skills. The company Allen Interactions has developed it for DROID by Motorola.

Allen Interactions (2015). *Droid by Motorola*. Retrieved from <http://resources.alleninteractions.com/online/demos/DROIDDOES/>

**FEATURES** **WHY ANDROID** **SELL IT IN 60** **ACCESSORIES** **ROLEPLAY** **QUIZ** **ETC**

verizon | Google | Motorola

**Customer:** I've been hearing all sorts of buzz about this new phone. I think it's called DROID? I'm pretty sure I want one, but I have some questions. Like what about battery life? Does a phone like this drain batteries fast?

**RESPONSE 1**  
Great! First, let's talk a little bit about what you need in a mobile device. Do you do a lot of texting, emailing and Web browsing on your phone? If not, we can find a different phone that's a better match.

**RESPONSE 2**  
This has a large battery that gives up to 6 hours of use time. Plus, conserve battery by turning off Wi-Fi, Bluetooth® and GPS when you don't need them. Check out the Power Control widget!

**RESPONSE 3**  
Not at all. This phone won't drain a battery any faster than whatever phone you have right now. I can practically guarantee it!

Click on the most appropriate response to the customer's question.

Identifying needs is an important part of the sales process when a customer comes in with no idea or only a vague idea of what to buy. This customer wants to see DROID. Answer his questions about it.

**[ TRY AGAIN ]**

**DROID BY MOTOROLA** **LEGAL** **GLOSSARY** © Motorola, Inc. All rights reserved.

## Serious games

Game developed by Allen Interactions for the Manhattan Associates Distribution Center to simulate tasks.

Allen Interactions (2015). *Manhattan Associates Distribution Center*. Retrieved from <https://studiov.alleni.com/clients/demos/manhattan/scanDemo/>



Exam results' presentation in a serious game developed by the Swiss company E-teach for the Lausanne Hotel School.

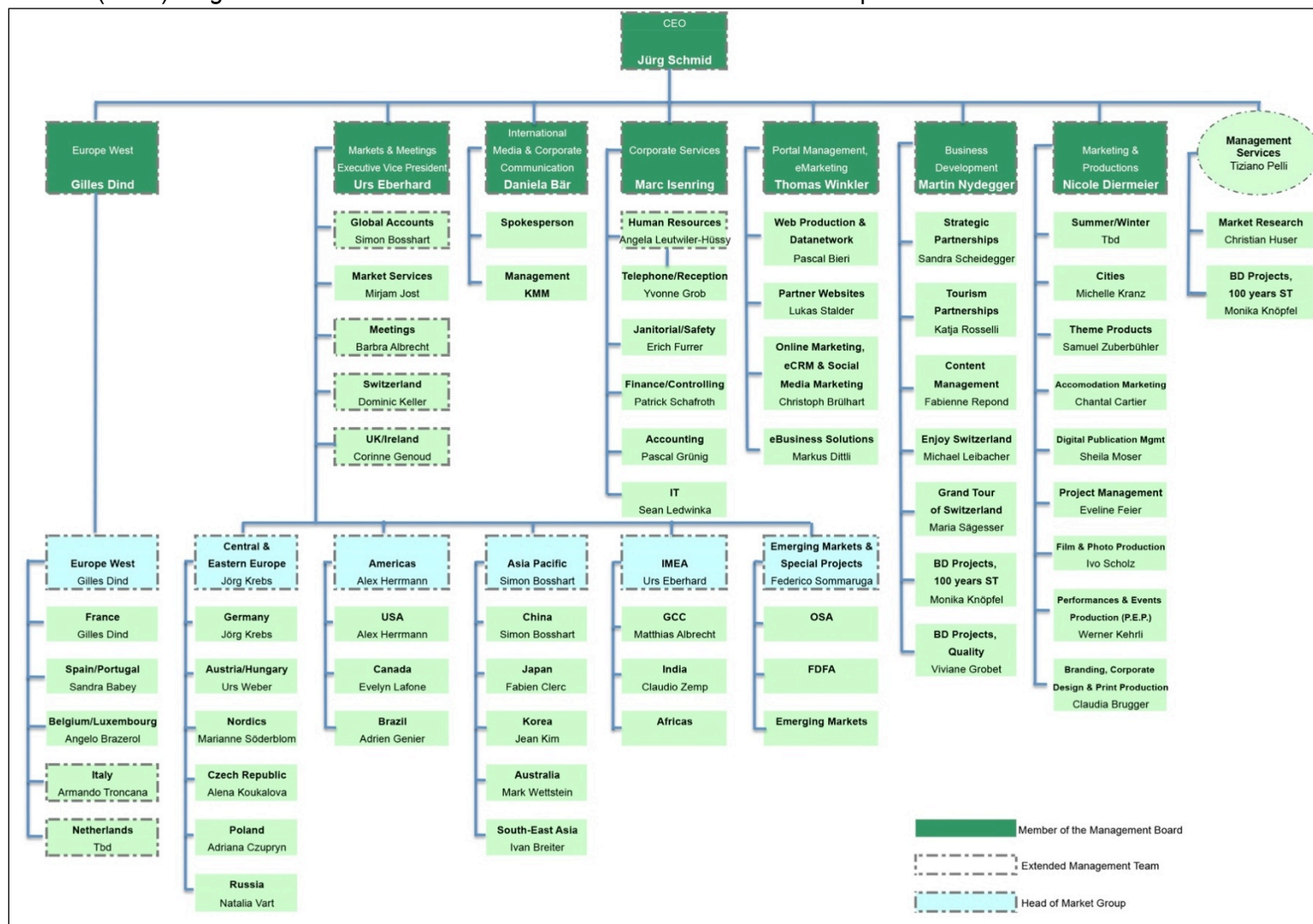
E-teach (2015). *Portfolio*. Retrieved from <http://www.e-teach.ch/portfolio.php>





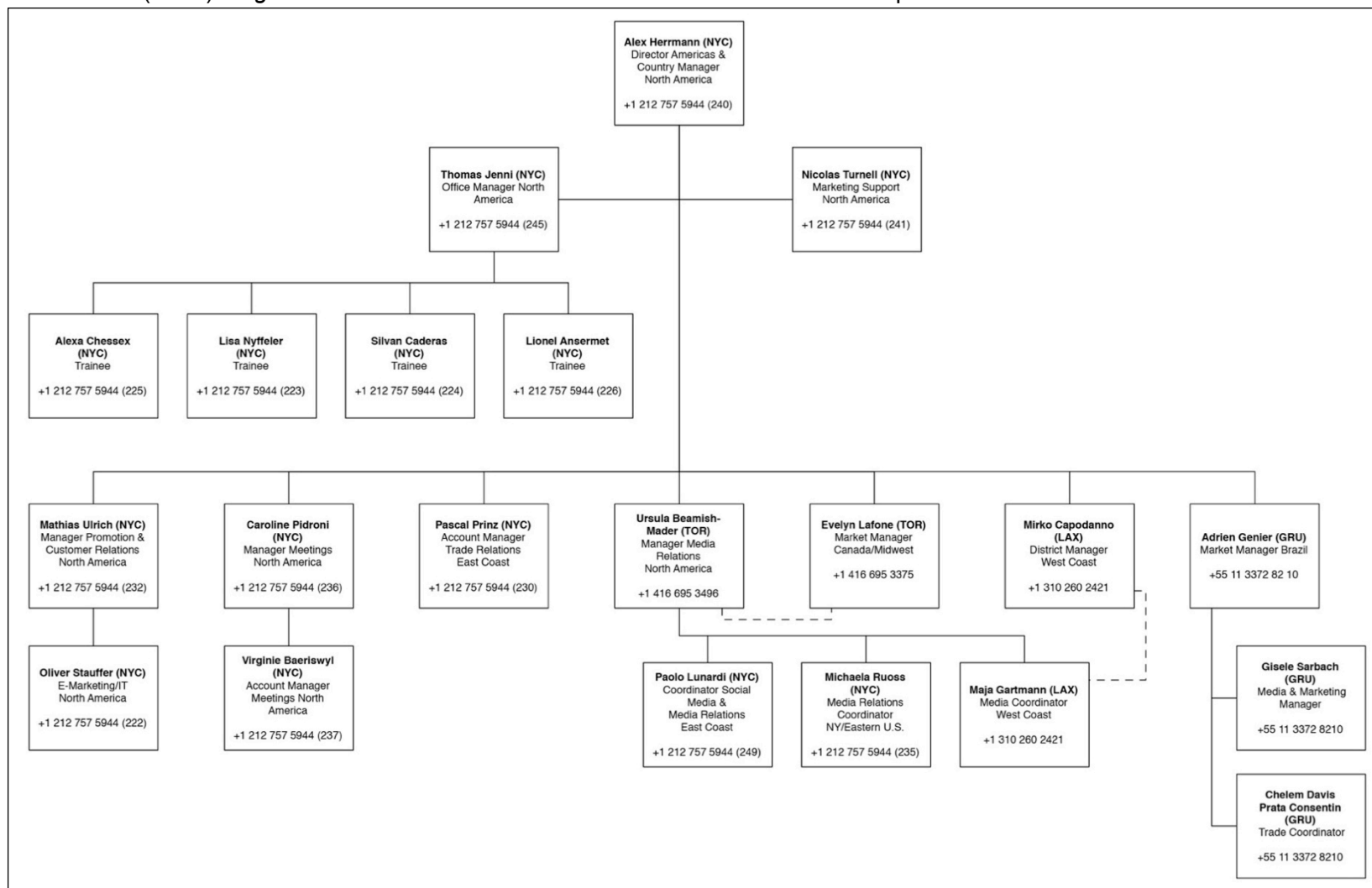
## Appendix II – Organizational chart of Switzerland Tourism

Switzerland Tourism (2015). *Organization chart of Switzerland Tourism*. Retrieved from <http://www.stnet.ch/files/?id=80750>



## Appendix III – Organizational chart of Switzerland Tourism North America

Switzerland Tourism (2015). *Organization chart of Switzerland Tourism*. Retrieved from <http://www.stnet.ch/files/?id=80750>




## Appendix IV – Switzerland Goldflower Group on LinkedIn.

LinkedIn Corporation (2015). *Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism*. Retrieved from <https://www.linkedin.com/grp/home?gid=4346282>


The screenshot shows the LinkedIn group page for "Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism". The page header includes the LinkedIn logo, a search bar, and navigation tabs: Home, Profile, Connections, Jobs, and Interests. The group's profile picture is a gold flower logo, and the name "Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism" is displayed with a lock icon. Below the name are tabs for Discussions, Jobs, About, Search, and Manage. A section titled "Start a discussion with your group" includes a text input field for a discussion title. The main feed shows three posts, each by a user with the role "Support Trade Relations & Meetings chez Switzerland Tourism". The first post, by Lionel Ansermet, is titled "New Swiss public transport luggage service as of December 13" and discusses the Swiss Travel System's new service for December 13, 2015. It includes a link to "corner.stnet.ch" and a "more" link. The second post, by Lisa Nyffeler, is titled "Join us on Thursday at 12pm to learn more about art, architecture and history in Lucerne." and promotes a webinar. The third post, also by Lionel Ansermet, is titled "Hotel of the Week: Hotel Täscherhof, Zermatt Region" and describes a mountain hotel in Täsch. Each post has a comment section with a text input field and a "Add a comment..." button. The page also shows likes and follows for each post.

in Search for people, jobs, companies, and more...

Home Profile Connections Jobs Interests


 **Goldflower Club Switzerland Tourism** 🔒

Discussions Jobs About Search Manage

 **Start a discussion with your group**

Enter a discussion title

Sort by: Recent ▾

 **Lionel Ansermet** Support Trade Relations & Meetings chez Switzerland Tourism ▾


**New Swiss public transport luggage service as of December 13**

Swiss Travel System want you to be able to offer your clients the maximum possible comfort and convenience when travelling to, within and back from our country by public transport.


With effect from December 13, 2015 the  
... [more](#)

Swiss public transport luggage service 2016.  
[corner.stnet.ch](http://corner.stnet.ch) • Swiss Travel System want you to be able to offer your clients the maximum possible comfort and convenience when travelling to, within and back from our country by public transport. With...

Comment (0) • Like (1) • Follow 2 days ago

 Eleanor Flagler Hardy likes this

Add a comment...


 **Lisa Nyffeler** Support Trade Relations & Meetings at Switzerland Tourism ▾

**Join us on Thursday at 12pm to learn more about art, architecture and history in Lucerne.**


By participating in this webinar's quiz you'll also get the chance to win a Swiss Winter Surprise Box.

Trade Webinar "Art, Architecture and History in Lucerne"  
[attendee.gotowebinar.com](http://attendee.gotowebinar.com) • By clicking this button, you submit your information to the webinar organizer, who will use it to communicate with you regarding this event and their other services. Close Your...

Comment (0) • Unlike (1) • Follow 11 days ago


 You like this

Add a comment...

 **Lionel Ansermet** Support Trade Relations & Meetings chez Switzerland Tourism ▾

**Hotel of the Week: Hotel Täscherhof, Zermatt Region**

Typical Valais-style mountain hotel in a convenient location, with train-line to Zermatt at no distance on foot. Magnificent mountain panorama with far-reaching view & the only wheelchair accessible hotel in Täsch. Well-aired ... [more](#)

 **Hotel Täscherhof, Täsch**  
[myswitzerland.com](http://myswitzerland.com) • Rustic painted furniture decorates most rooms - along

## Appendix V – Switzerland Tourism 2015 webinar schedule

Adapted from Switzerland Tourism (2015). *Upcoming webinars 2015*. Retrieved from [http://corner.stnet.ch/trade-us/?page\\_id=142](http://corner.stnet.ch/trade-us/?page_id=142)

Date	Topic	Partner
January 15, 2015	Public Transportation System/Booking	Swiss Travel System / Rail Europe
January 29, 2015	Lucerne	Lake Lucerne Region
February 12, 2015	Grand Tour of Switzerland with Globus Family of Brands	Globus Family of Brands
February 26, 2015	Soft Adventure and E-Biking in Interlaken	Interlaken Tourism
March 12, 2015	Food and Wine in Ticino	Ticino
March 26, 2015	Travel Like a Local in Zurich	Zurich
April 9, 2015	Multigenerational Travel in the Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region	Lake Geneva Matterhorn Region
April 16, 2015	Find the perfect hotel with Sorell Hotel Switzerland	Sorell Hotel Switzerland
April 23, 2015	Grand Tour of Switzerland with Travel Bound	Travel Bound
May 7, 2015	Grand Train Tour with Avanti Destinations	Avanti Destinations
May 21, 2015	Travel Like a Local in the Lake Lucerne Region, Mt. Pilatus	Lake Lucerne Region, Mt. Pilatus
May 28, 2015	Hiking without luggage with Jungfrau Railways	Jungfrau Railways
June 25, 2015	Relax and Enjoy Wellness/Wellbeing in Bern	Bern
July 9, 2015	Soft Adventure with Engadin St. Moritz	Engadin St. Moritz
August 6, 2015	Switzerland with Collette Vacations	Collette Vacations
August 20, 2015	Grand Train Tour with Swiss Travel System	Swiss Travel System
September 3, 2015	Switzerland Deluxe, Faith-based Travel & Watch Tours, evtl. Motorcycle with STC	Switzerland Travel Centre
September 17, 2015	Winter, made in Switzerland with Ski.com	Ski.com
October 1, 2015	Following James Bond's paths on the Schilthorn	Jungfrau Region, Schilthorn
October 15, 2015	River Cruises, Pre and Post stays in Basel	Basel
October 29, 2015	Art., Architecture and History in Lucerne	Lucerne
November 12, 2015	Come up and Slow down in Gstaad	BE!
November 19, 2015	Winter, made in Switzerland with Engadin St. Moritz	Engadin St. Moritz
December 3, 2015	Christmas Markets and Winter Experiences in the Jungfrau Region	Jungfrau Region

## Appendix VI – Structure of the Switzerland Advisor Program

Adapted from Switzerland Tourism (2015). *Switzerland Advisor Program*. Retrieved from <http://www.travelagentacademy.com/Switzerland>

### Chapter One – Introduction to Switzerland

- Prime Markets
  - High-End
  - Nature-Lovers
  - Culture-Lovers
  - Foodies
- Top Selling Points
  - Location
  - Nature and Adventure
  - Cities
  - Food & Wine
  - Culture & Events
  - Hospitality
- Fast Facts
  - Location
  - Population
  - Language
  - Currency
  - Shopping
  - Business hours
  - Sales tax
  - Mobile phones
  - Country code
  - Voltage
  - Climate and Clothing
- How to Get There and Around
  - Airports
  - Swiss Travel System
  - Car

### Chapter Two – Learn about Destinations, the Cities and Regions in Switzerland

- Top Destinations
- Cities
  - Zurich
  - Lucerne
  - Geneva
  - Lausanne
  - Bern
  - Basel

- Lugano
- St. Gallen
- Winterthur
- Mountain Regions
  - Bernese Oberland
  - Valais
  - Graubünden
  - Ticino

### **Chapter Three – Learn about Activities and Special Interests**

- Special Interests
  - Summer Active Vacations
  - Skiing & Winter Sports/Christmas Markets
  - UNESCO
  - Family
  - Food & Wine
  - Well-Being
  - Religious
  - Meetings
  - River Cruising
  - Rail Enthusiasts

### **Chapter Four – Plan Switzerland Vacations for your Clients**

- Tours
  - Switzerland Tours
  - Tours Including Switzerland
  - Suggested Itineraries
  - Tour Operators
- Accommodations
  - Hotels
  - Apartments
  - Youth Hostels
  - Campsites
  - Chalets
  - Other types of lodging
- Events
  - Top Events
  - Special Events
  - Living Traditions
- Apps
- More Info
  - Contacts

## Appendix VII – Online survey among travel professionals

Author's data.

### Introduction

Thank you for your contribution. Do not miss your chance to participate in the sweepstake at the end of the survey! Enter to win two 8-days 1st class Swiss Travel Passes, an amazing Swatch watch and other typically Swiss prizes.

*\* Required*

### Questions

1. How do you currently increase your knowledge about a tourism destination? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Magazines; books; printed newsletters
- ☐ Websites, e-newsletters, blogs
- ☐ Travel shows
- ☐ Conferences
- ☐ Webinars
- ☐ Online training Specialist Programs
- ☐ Social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)
- ☐ Other:

2. Have you ever been enrolled in an interactive online learning course about a tourism destination? \*

*By interactive online learning course, we mean a course that you can take by yourself at your own rhythm, such as the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program, the New Zealand Kiwi Specialist program, the South African Expert Training, etc.*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes → Skip to question 3
- ☐ No → Skip to question 14

3. Select the 3 main reasons for taking interactive online learning courses about tourism destinations? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- To have a better knowledge about the country
- To enrich my resume
- To sell more and earn more
- To respond my clients' needs/requests
- To respond my manager's requests
- To expose official certification in my office
- To win a competition
- To participate in familiarization trips
- To gain access to special offers
- To be registered on the destination's official travel agents list
- To get leads of new clients
- Other:

4. On average, how much time a week do you spend for interactive online learning courses?\*

*Remember that this time can be split in several sessions.*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Less than one hour
- 1-2 hours
- More than 2 hours

5. How many tourism online training programs have you completed? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10
- More than 10



6. Did you improve your knowledge about the destination by taking the interactive online training course of a tourism destination? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, totally
- ☐ Yes, somehow
- ☐ Only slightly
- ☐ Not at all

7. Do you feel more confident recommending and selling a destination to your clients after taking a course featuring it? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, totally
- ☐ Yes, somehow
- ☐ Only slightly
- ☐ Not at all

8. According to you, what is the most effective duration of an interactive online training course for a tourism destination? \*

*Remember that this time can be split in several sessions.*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Less than 3 hours
- ☐ 3-5 hours
- ☐ 5-10 hours
- ☐ More than 10 hours
- ☐ I don't know

9. What are the 3 most interesting and valuable elements you take out of an interactive online training course about a tourism destination? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- General information about the destination (geography, language, culture, currency, food, etc.)
- Information about transportation system (price, tickets, how to get around, etc.)
- Main activities at destinations (museums, events, shopping, must see, restaurants)
- Top Selling Tips
- Special offers at destination (hotel deals, promotion, special excursions, etc)
- To learn about new products
- To learn how to sell the destination
- To learn where to find resources and information about the destination
- To learn about incoming operators / tour operators featuring the
- To discover local tips and insights
- Other:

10. Please, name up to three interactive online training courses about tourism destinations that you found the most beneficial?

11. Why were those the most beneficial to you?

*Check all that apply.*

- You have a better knowledge on the destination
- You learned where to find resources and information
- You learned how to sell the destination
- The courses made you dream about the destination
- The courses were fun
- Other:

12. Do you think that you would more likely enroll in new interactive online learning courses if they were available on mobile devices (tablets and smartphones)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes
- Maybe
- No
- I don't know

13. Have you enrolled to the interactive online training course of Switzerland Tourism, the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes → Skip to question 17
- ☐ No → Skip to question 19

14. Why have you never attended an interactive online learning course about a tourism destination? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Didn't know about the possibility
- ☐ Not interested in such courses
- ☐ The destination that interests me does not offer such courses
- ☐ I do not have enough time
- ☐ Not useful for my business
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other:

15. Do you think that it would be more likely for you to enroll in an interactive online learning course if it was available as an app for tablets and smartphones? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ Maybe
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

16. We are currently striving to improve our Switzerland online training Program. Which one of the following activities/features would help you in the process of recommending and selling Switzerland?

*Check all that apply.*

- Scenario: virtual discussion with a client
- Serious game (immersion in a professional environment where you must use your skills to carry out a mission)
- Interactive maps
- Possibility to exchange with other participants (e.g. forum)
- Possibility to ask questions to the Switzerland Tourism Trade Team
- Drag & Drop activities
- Local Tips
- Videos
- I don't know
- Other:

→ Skip to question 45

17. What were your 3 main motivations for taking the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- To have a better knowledge about Switzerland
- To get more comfortable in selling Switzerland to your clients
- To enrich my resume
- To sell more and earn more
- To respond my client's needs/requests
- To respond my manager's requests
- To certified as a Switzerland Advisor and expose official certification in my office
- To have the right to use the Switzerland Tourism Campus logo on your letters, brochures, website and email signature
- To win a competition
- To participate in educational/familiarization trips to Switzerland
- To gain access to special offers
- To be listed on the MySwitzerland.com website as an official Switzerland Advisor travel agent and get leads of new clients
- To be invited to exclusive Swiss events all over North America
- To get CEU credits from The Travel Institute and from the Canadian Institute of Travel Counselor
- Other:

18. Did you complete the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program and are currently a Switzerland Advisor? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes → Skip to question 23
- ☐ No → Skip to question 41

19. Why did you never take the interactive online training course of Switzerland Tourism, the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ I never heard about this program
- ☐ I am not interested
- ☐ My clients are more interested in other destinations than Switzerland
- ☐ I am not convinced that taking this course will help me selling Switzerland
- ☐ Not enough time to take this course
- ☐ Other:

20. We are currently striving to improve our Switzerland online training Program. Which one of the following activities/features would help you in the process of recommending and selling Switzerland?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Scenario: virtual discussion with a client
- ☐ Serious game (immersion in a professional environment where you must use your skills to carry out a mission)
- ☐ Interactive maps
- ☐ Possibility to exchange with other participants (e.g. forum)
- ☐ Possibility to ask questions to the Switzerland Tourism Trade Team
- ☐ Drag & Drop activities
- ☐ Local Tips
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other:

21. Would you be interested in a new interactive online learning course, about a specific topic and very short (1-2 hours)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes → Skip to question 22
- ☐ No → Skip to question 45
- ☐ I don't know → Skip to question 45

22. Which topic are you interested in?

→ Skip to question 45.

23. Congratulations! Has the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program helped you increase your knowledge about Switzerland? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, I know a lot more about Switzerland since I have graduated
- ☐ It has only increased my knowledge about Switzerland a little
- ☐ It has not increase my knowledge about Switzerland at all
- ☐ I don't know

24. Did you get the information you were looking for? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, totally
- ☐ Yes, somehow
- ☐ No
- ☐ I don't know

25. Do you feel more confident selling Switzerland after having graduated? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ I feel way more confident
- ☐ I feel a little more confident
- ☐ I do not feel more confident
- ☐ I feel more confused
- ☐ I don't know

26. Did you increase sales of the destination Switzerland after having graduated? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, totally
- ☐ Yes, somehow
- ☐ Only slightly
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ No

27. Do you think the length of the course is appropriate (3 hours)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, it was appropriate
- ☐ No, it was slightly too long
- ☐ No, it was way too long
- ☐ No, it was too short

28. Do you think that the difficulty of the exam is appropriate? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, it was appropriate
- ☐ No, it was too difficult
- ☐ No, it was too easy

29. Do you feel that the course is interactive enough? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes, totally
- ☐ Yes, somehow
- ☐ Only slightly
- ☐ Not at all
- ☐ I don't know

30. Please rate the user-friendliness of the program: \*

*1 = very easy to use / 2 = ok / 3 = sometimes complicated / 4 = too complicated to use*

*Mark only one oval.*

1   2   3   4

Very easy

Too complicated

31. What is your overall level of satisfaction with the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Very satisfied
- ☐ Somewhat satisfied
- ☐ Slightly satisfied
- ☐ Not satisfied at all

32. According to you, what information is the most important to find in an online training program about Switzerland? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ General information about Switzerland (geography, language, culture, currency, food, etc.)
- ☐ Information about transportation system (price, tickets, how to get around, etc.)
- ☐ Main activities in Switzerland (museums, events, shopping, must see, restaurants)
- ☐ Special offers in Switzerland (hotel deals, promotion, special excursions, etc.)
- ☐ To learn about Switzerland's new products
- ☐ To learn how to sell Switzerland
- ☐ To learn where to find resources and information about Switzerland
- ☐ To discover local tips and insights
- ☐ To learn about incoming operators / tour operators featuring Switzerland
- ☐ Other:



33. What are the 3 features and activities that you liked most in the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Texts
- ☐ Pictures
- ☐ Quizzes
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ Links to MySwitzerland.com
- ☐ Possibility to download brochures
- ☐ Exams

34. Which features and activities did you like the least in the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Texts
- ☐ Pictures
- ☐ Quizzes
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ Links to MySwitzerland.com
- ☐ Possibility to download brochures
- ☐ Exams
- ☐ None

35. We are currently striving to improve the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program. Which one of the following activities/features would help you in the process of recommending and selling Switzerland? \*

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Scenario: virtual discussion with a client
- ☐ Serious game (immersion in a professional environment where you must use your skills to carry out a mission)
- ☐ Interactive maps
- ☐ Possibility to exchange with other participants (e.g. forum)
- ☐ Possibility to ask questions to the Switzerland Tourism Trade Team
- ☐ Drag & Drop activities
- ☐ Local Tips

- Videos
- I don't know
- Other:

36. Do you have any personal advise/recommendation on how could the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program be improved?

37. Would you be interested in a new interactive online learning course, about a specific topic and very short (1-2 hours)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes → *Skip to question 38*
- No → *Skip to question 39*
- I don't know → *Skip to question 39*

38. Which topic are you interested in? \*

39. Would you be interested and available for a short discussion (max. 20 minutes via phone or Skype) about your level of confidence in selling Switzerland after having graduated as a Switzerland Advisor, as well as your expectations and motivation regarding interactive online? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- Yes → *Skip to question 40*
- No → *Skip to question 45*

40. Thank you! Please enter your contact details (your email address, phone number or name and address) below: \*

→ *Skip to question 45*

41. Why did you not complete the Switzerland Gold-Level Program? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Too long
- ☐ Did not bring what I expected
- ☐ Annoying
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other:

42. We are currently striving to improve the Switzerland Gold-Level Advisor Program. Which one of the following activities/features would help you in the process of recommending and selling Switzerland?

*Check all that apply.*

- ☐ Scenario: virtual discussion with a client
- ☐ Serious game (immersion in a professional environment where you must use your skills to carry out a mission)
- ☐ Interactive maps
- ☐ Possibility to exchange with other participants (e.g. forum)
- ☐ Possibility to ask questions to the Switzerland Tourism Trade Team
- ☐ Drag & Drop activities
- ☐ Local Tips
- ☐ Videos
- ☐ I don't know
- ☐ Other:

43. Would you be interested in a new interactive online learning course, about a specific topic and very short (1-2 hours)? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Yes → *Skip to question 44*
- ☐ No → *Skip to question 45*
- ☐ I don't know → *Skip to question 45*

44. Which topic are you interested in?

45. Please indicate if you are: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Female
- ☐ Male

46. Please indicate your age: \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Under 29
- ☐ 30 to 39
- ☐ 40 to 49
- ☐ 50 to 59
- ☐ Over 60

47. In which country are you based? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ United States
- ☐ Canada
- ☐ Other:

48. Who do you currently work for? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Independent Travel Agency
- ☐ Franchise Travel Agency
- ☐ Homeworker Travel Agency
- ☐ Online Travel Agency
- ☐ Tour Operator
- ☐ Other:

49. How many people are working in your company? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Only myself
- ☐ 5-10 people
- ☐ 10-20 people
- ☐ Over 20 people

50. For how many years have you been working in the tourism industry? \*

*Mark only one oval.*

- ☐ Less than 2
- ☐ 2-5 years
- ☐ 6-10 years
- ☐ More than 10 years

## **Sweepstake**

If you would like to participate in the sweepstake and enter to win two 8-days 1st class Swiss Travel Passes, an amazing original Swatch watch or other nice Swiss prices, please enter your contact details (your email address, phone number or name and address) below.

## **Conclusion**

Thank you very much for your time and your collaboration in this study. The prizes will be drawn on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015 and the winners will be contacted personally.

Your Switzerland Tourism Trade Team

[nyc.trade@switzerland.com](mailto:nyc.trade@switzerland.com)

## Appendix VIII – Survey email

Author own illustration with image from: Swiss-Image (2015). Cows. Retrieved from <http://www.swiss-image.ch>

**Lionel, give us your opinion and enter to win Swiss Travel Passes, an amazing watch and other typically Swiss surprises!**

**From :** Switzerland Tourism <nyc.trade@switzerland.com>

Tue, Jun 16, 2015 03:00 PM

**Subject :** Lionel, give us your opinion and enter to win Swiss Travel Passes, an amazing watch and other typically Swiss surprises!

**To :** Lionel Ansermet <lionel.ansermet@switzerland.com>

**Reply To :** nyc trade <nyc.trade@switzerland.com>

If this message is not displayed correctly, [please click here](#).



**Dear Lionel,**

We kindly ask you to participate in our online training [survey](#) . We want to ensure a great educational experience for you and therefore analyze travel agents' and tour operators' needs. The survey is conducted by Lionel Ansermet, student in tourism management at the University of Applied Sciences of Western Switzerland and intern with Switzerland Tourism.

Filling out the survey will not take more than 5 to 10 minutes. Your participation in this study is totally anonymous and voluntary.

In order to thank you for your contribution, do not miss your chance to participate in the sweepstake at the end of the survey! **You can win two 8-days 1st class Swiss Travel Passes, an amazing Swatch watch and other typically Swiss prices.**

Your collaboration is greatly appreciated and will help further improve our online training program.

**[TAKE THE SURVEY](#)**

We look forward to hearing from you!

Your Switzerland Trade Team

[› MySwitzerland.com](#)

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**Find us on the web**



## Appendix IX – Reminder in the trade e-newsletter

Author own illustration with data from: Swiss-Image (2015). *The Grand Tour of Switzerland*. Retrieved from <http://www.swiss-image.ch>



### Your opinion matters to us.

Participate in our online training survey and **enter to win two 8-days 1st class Swiss Travel Passes, an amazing original Swatch watch or other typically Swiss prices.**

#### TAKE THE SURVEY

Your collaboration is greatly appreciated and will help further improve our online training program.

[➤ Opinion Survey](#)

## Appendix X – Protocol of the in-depth interviews

Author's data.

**Date and time:**

**Company:**

**Name:**

**Position:**

**Switzerland Advisor: Yes/No Year:**

**Switzerland Specialist: Yes/No Year:**

### **Motivations in enrolling in the Switzerland Advisor Program**

1. What were the main reasons for taking eLearning instead of other supports (webinars, brochures, website, etc.)?
2. What added value did you find in an eLearning program?
3. What were your expectations from the Switzerland Advisor Program?

### **Information retention**

4. Do you still remember what you have learned during the course?

### **Confidence in selling and recommending Switzerland upon graduation**

5. Do you feel more confident in selling and recommending Switzerland?
6. Why yes? Why no?

### **Use of selling tips learned in the Switzerland Advisor Program**

7. Do you sometime give your clients tips learned in the Switzerland Advisor Program?

### **Sales increase due to the Switzerland Advisor Program**

8. Have you increased your sales of Switzerland since you have graduated?

### **Possibility of new resources**

9. What new resources do you expect from Switzerland Tourism in an online learning interactive course?
10. What is your general feedback of the Switzerland Advisor Program?



## Appendix XI – The 15 modules of the 100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme

Adapted from Tourism New Zealand (2015). *100% Pure New Zealand Specialist Programme*. Retrieved from <http://traveltrade.newzealand.com/en/training/nz-specialist-programme>

### Core modules:

- Welcome to New Zealand
- Practical Travel Knowledge for New Zealand

### Regions:

- Auckland and Northland
- Canterbury and West Coast
- Coastal Otago, Dunedin and Southland
- Nelson Tasman and Marlborough
- Pacific Coast Highway
- Southern Lakes and Central Otago
- Thermal Explorer Highway
- Wellington and Wairarapa
- Western North Island

### Special interests:

- How to Sell Walking and Hiking in New Zealand
- How to Sell New Zealand Cruising
- How to Sell Ski New Zealand
- Driving Safely in New Zealand

### Conditions to obtain the “100% New Zealand Specialist” certificate:

1. Complete at least 10 out of the 15 modules of the program:
2. Visit New Zealand for at least 3 nights in the last 5 years (10 years for travel agents based in Europe).
3. Undertake some Tourism New Zealand training in the market.

## Author declaration

I hereby declare that I have carried out this final research project on my own without any help other than the references listed in the list of references and that I have only used the sources mentioned. I will not provide a copy of this paper to a third party without the permission of the department head and of my advisor, including the partner company with which I collaborated on this project, with the exception of those who provided me with information needed to write this paper and whose names follow:

- Alex Herrmann, Director Americas at Switzerland Tourism
- Pascal Prinz, Account Manager Trade Relations at Switzerland Tourism



Lionel Ansermet